Young adults' decision-making in their transition to world-of-work and the role of key influencers and Scottish policies in shaping and supporting educational choices

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Abstract

This thesis examines young adults' educational decision-making and the role of key influencers in that process. The study is set in a Scottish context. As such, Scottish strategies and policies governing young adults' transitions to school are considered in the analysis. The key policies examined in the study are the Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) strategy and CIAG (Careers Information, Advice, and Guidance) policies.

I used a qualitative research design with a Critical Realist framework to examine 16 young adults' journeys from school to Modern Apprenticeship (MA) training. Additionally, 3 policy experts and 12 influencers were interviewed to gain a better understanding of the roles of different influencers in young adults' decision-making. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews.

Young adults' decision-making and the role of key influencers were examined through five research questions. These research questions focused on 1) the main reasons young adults seek MA training, 2) identifying the key influencers for young adults, 3) the ways influencers affect young adults' educational choices, 4) examining the role of institutional influencers in supporting the execution of young adults' choices, and 5) how the measures introduced by DYW strategy influence young adults' choices to pursue MA training.

My findings indicate that young adults pursue MA training for both intrinsic and instrumental reasons. Instrumental reasons appear to be predominant in MA pathway selection. The pathway choice is also done to fulfil a long-term aim of a good career.

The key influencers for young adults varied across their journeys. The influencers included personal influencers (parents, siblings, friends, relatives) and institutional influencers (teachers, career advisors, employer representatives, training providers, and employability support workers). Personal influencers became increasingly prominent as the journeys became longer. The main forms of influence consisted of information, practical support, and taking part in reflexive decision-making about career choices.

Institutional influencers played an important role in supporting young adults' decision-making, providing practical assistance, and encouraging certain transition behaviours. The measures introduced by the DYW strategy were found to expose young adults to more careers as intended. However, they also appeared to contribute to the persistent negative perception of apprenticeships training. The implications of the findings for policy and practice are discussed.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 The focus of the study

Skills have become an important topic in societal discussions as they are considered a key for gaining employment and maintaining well-being and good quality of life. Skills of the young people who are transitioning from schooling to the labour market have been found themselves to be a focus of various policy initiatives (European Commission, 2019; Scottish Government, 2014a). Thus, young people's school-to-work transitions have been as an area of focus in policy and research across the Western world (Brahm et al., 2014; Graaf and Zenderen, 2013; Raffe et al., 2001a).

This study examines how different influencers affect the young adults' (aged between 18-25) educational decision-making and career choices, which is an important piece of young adults' transitions discussion. The focus is on how the young adults make decisions, the resources they use in the process, and how different influencing actors (influencers) affect young adults' decision-making. Specific area of interest in this study is the apprenticeships pathway into the labour market and employment in the Scotland.

The study seeks to further the understanding of how influencers in social contexts or fields that young adults occupy affect educational choices. I examine the effects of influencers, and how young adults use them in decision-making, during two key decision-making phases in young adults' journeys. These phases were identified from the interview data. The first phase takes place at towards the end of young adults' compulsory education in schools. It is an important phase for state's attempts to influence young adults as that is where they encounter much of the formal career guidance provided by the state. The second key phase takes place after young adults have left the school environment, reflect on the choices they made in school, and encounter life circumstances where they reflect on their future options and past choices.

The study also seeks to examine the possible effects of the Scottish policies that seek to shape and support the transitions of young adults from school to work and further education. Therefore, the role that Scottish education and skills strategies, which include Developing the Young Workforce (DYW; Scottish Government, 2014) and the CIAG strategies (Education Scotland, 2015a, 2015b; Skills Development Scotland, 2012), are examined as part of the structural context in which the young adults make their choices. As the important DYW

strategy has run its original planned 7 years but is still in practical effect, it is an opportune time to examine how some of the measures contained in the policy might be affecting young adults' educational pathway choices.

This introduction chapter begins with an outline of the researched issue, the context in which the research takes place, and why the researcher is interested in the topic. That is followed by the research aims and questions of the study. Finally, the introduction outlines the theoretical perspective adopted by the research and discusses the reasons for the case-selection that are used to research the central problem of the study.

1.2 Skills and young adults' transitions to work as a policy and research focus

Skills have been a topic of focus for several international institutions and nation states around the world. Although it is perhaps more accurate to state that there are several issues related to skills, such as skills matching, employability, and underemployment among other skills related issues, which manifest themselves as policy issues to be solved. In the UK for example, these range from skills shortages in certain sectors like IT, which could threaten large modernisation programs of institutions such as the NHS (Larsson, 2019). The issue is not only lack of skills, but rather the kinds of skills there are present in the labour market and what are needed by the employers. The range of skills contained in the nation – especially the lack of intermediate skills – has been identified as an issue that has hindered the economic growth and productivity in the UK (Maguire, 1998; Payne, 2009; Vickerstaff, 1998). Alongside the need for skills is the specific issue of getting young people employed which is also at the centre of the Scottish Developing the Young Workforce strategy governing young adults' transitions.

Technological change and focus on skills

Attention to skills and labour markets has been emphasised by technological change. Economists like Frey and Osborne have predicted that by 2050 up to 40% of current jobs are at risk of being automated (Seager, 2016). The recent pace of technological change as well as the arrival of AI and more advanced robotics are shaping the conversation about jobs and careers, making it relevant today, but this is not a new problem for societies. There have been significant changes in the developed economies even before the arrival of AI in the past decades.

Whereas in the 1980s industrial production was still the leading driver of the national economy in the UK and US for example, at the time of writing (year 2022) services constitute the largest sector in the UK not only in terms of GDP but also in employment. The percentage of GDP coming from services in the UK has grown from 46% in 1948 to 79% in 2013 (ONS, 2016) The percentage of people being employed in services has experienced similar growth and in 2011 80% of people were employed in service sector (ONS, 2016).

Even within the different sectors of the economy the jobs have changed. Manufacturing is often used as the example as this is one of the sectors most affected by automation, but it is by no means the only sector affected by the change. Whereas previously the manufacturing jobs were arranged –generally speaking—along the Fordist lines where each person was allocated a small task that was relatively straightforward, and they managed that task to contribute to the final product (Kumar, 2004). The common framing is that this has changed due to automation and now there are fewer jobs in the production line but more high-skilled jobs to manage the machinery (Rifkin, 2004). This has not only affected the types of jobs available, but it is putting different pressures on the kinds of training that is being provided for the people in the labour market, especially for young people who are finishing their compulsory education and starting their chosen pathway into the world of work. Whether young adults consider the implications of these developments to their employability and career progression in their choices when they seek vocational education and training (VET) is of interest in the study.

2008 economic downturn and its effects on young people's employment

The 2008 financial crisis is one of the most significant events in recent history for capitalist economies and its effects are still felt today in many ways. Many European countries turned towards more conservative governments in the aftermath of the crisis, including the UK. In the UK the government pursued austerity policies whose goal was to bring down the government deficit that had experienced growth after the crisis. However, the turn towards Conservatives was not universal in UK and Scotland experienced somewhat different shift where the Scottish National Party experienced growth. This led to a larger divergence between Scotland and the rest of UK politically than before when both Scotland and the rest of the UK were under majority labour rule. The effects of the divergence are discussed further in Chapter 3 but the importance of the disruptive effects of the 2008 financial crisis to the political systems is important to acknowledge in shaping the political landscape in the UK and Scotland.

The economic impacts of the financial crisis were felt strongly in many countries with increases in unemployment being reality around Europe. The economic depression hit the young people especially hard (Bell and Blanchflower, 2011). These young people who were just about to go to the labour market without much job experience, and especially those without high level qualifications, were left in a tight spot as the employers stopped hiring at levels that they had previously done. This led to a cohort of young people who were unable to get to the labour market and went directly to unemployment instead, further weakening their position. The issues caused by the financial crisis were exacerbated in many ways by the subsequent economic challenges, such as the 2012 Euro crisis. The economic context has resulted in policies being crafted to counteract the effects of the crisis, or at least the crisis being used as a rationale for policy changes.

Scotland identified the transition from school to work as one of the weak points. As the young adults in process of transitioning to the labour market were among the most affected, the policy measures were targeted at this phase. The policy measures taken in Scotland to address the perceived weakness in school-to-work transitions are further examined in chapter 3, but it is important to recognise that one of the major short-term reasons for the reforms in educational transition policies was the economic downturn that started after the financial crisis. Funding for these reformed programmes had to come from somewhere, and in some cases, it appears to have come from adult education. The emphasis appeared to turn from lifelong learning that enriched people's lives towards young people and into programmes that specifically helped young people gain economically useful skills. This shift from a broad understanding of lifelong learning policies and programs towards a more utilitarian, economy focused policies has not only been occurring in Scotland but also elsewhere in Europe (Lowden et al., 2016; Valiente et al., 2020b).

The programs addressing young adults' transitions have been implemented in various countries over the years since the economic depression, they have garnered more attention from researcher who examined how the strategies seek to help young people to be employed (Valiente et al., 2020a). This thesis is seeking to contribute to that ongoing research effort that examines the young adults' transition to world-of-work. The approach adopted in this thesis focuses on the young adults' educational decision making and seeks to understand how different influencers influence young adults' decision-making and especially the choice to go into VET education and training via the apprenticeship pathway. Additionally, the study

examines how policy measures introduced in the Developing the Young Workforce policy have affected the young adults' transitions in Scotland.

The Covid-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic caused another economic shock, although different in nature to the 2008 great recession, as well as sudden change in the society. The pandemic led to wide-ranging furloughs in the economy (HM Treasury, 2020; Islam, 2021), temporary school closures and long-distance learning (UNESCO, 2021). The Covid pandemic is a consideration in this thesis since it affected the young adults' transitions to universities, colleges, and Modern Apprenticeships (MA). While the policy environment and the service infrastructure that contains schooling, careers services and apprenticeships was not designed to withstand events such as the Covid-19 pandemic, it was designed to make the whole transition from school to VET more robust with the introduction of the DYW policy.

Since the Covid pandemic had such a profound impact on society, the study also seeks examines how it might have affected the young adults' journeys to further training and work. In that sense, the Covid-19 pandemic introduced another contextual element with its additional challenges, barriers, and in some cases opportunities for the young adult participants in this study.

The Covid-19 pandemic hit as the data collection for the study was being designed, resulting in a need to broaden the range of young adults recruited for the study from the original more limited range of sectors.

After adjusting the data collection plan, participants in the study consisted of 16 young adult apprentices, 3 policy experts, and 12 institutional influencers – 9 career advisors or work coaches, 1 company recruiter, and 1 employability support worker. The study also sought to gain information from key influencers that affect the young adults, but due to lack of responses from these influencers the number of responses from influencers tied directly to the young adults in the cases is limited. As a result, the study shifted its focus on the institutional influencers.

1.3 Researcher background

Besides being worth a look due to its contemporary significance, the topic examined in this thesis also has personal significance for me. I grew up in a rural part of Finland where my friends from school chose the vocational school pathway to learn a trade at the age of sixteen.

However, I did not have any specific trade or profession that interested me. As a result, I was the only one from my friend group who went to high school and began pursuing the academic route to the world of work.

At the time I did not think too much about the fact that most people I knew chose to pursue the vocational route after they finished school. After all, it is not uncommon in Finland for many young adults to prefer the vocational route to work. For example, in 2016 56% of young people applied to go to a vocational school and 44% went to high school according to the national statistical institution of Finland (Ikonen, 2016). My friends had careers they were interested in, so it made sense that they pursued the route that led them to their chosen field of work. However, I did not have any idea what I wanted to do, so high school offered me a chance to think about what I wanted to do for three more years. Indeed, high school was presented to us as the option for those that wanted to go into higher education, but also the option for those that did not yet know what they wanted to do and wanted to study more subjects in school to identify their strengths and interests.

I completed the International Baccalaureate programme in high school, which gave me an appreciation for a wider, international perspective to issues and it also showed me how education can be provided in different ways. After all, I was part of a small group in the high school that did a completely different curriculum than the rest of the students in the school. Although we all gained diplomas that were valued seemingly equally in the eyes of universities and other educational institutions, the school experiences were different. However, it was only once I finished my high-school and moved to Scotland to study psychology in University of Glasgow when I started to appreciate that my educational experiences were unusual in Scottish context. Almost no-one among my friends (at least Scottish friends) in university had friends from school who had chosen vocational education path to work. This made me curious about educational decision-making, and how different contexts appeared to result in very different patterns of choices.

The part that especially interests me about educational decision-making is the role of influencers. That is to say, how other people can influence educational choices. In my home environment I did not encounter many people who had done higher education or achieved degrees, whereas to my friends in Glasgow that was commonplace. While I did have some relatives that had done higher education, I was not close to them. Instead, the person that was pushing me to invest the time and effort into education was my mother. She did not have an opportunity to complete much education in her youth as she started working full-time at

around age 15 and has been working ever since. The support and encouragement I received from her is not unique as many other people have supporting parents. However, in the rural farming area I grew up, the expectation was that I, like my peers in similar position, would most likely continue running the family farm or business. For the rest, it was assumed that they get a qualified for a trade and gain employment as soon as possible. It is partially due to my mother's encouragement that I ended up going to higher education, but it is something that I really only realised in Glasgow.

After completing my undergraduate studies in psychology, I became increasingly interested in education, lifelong learning, and how different factors affected people's educational decision-making. I was accepted into Education, Public Policy and Equity course in University of Glasgow which sparked my interest public policy and how the macro level issues such as policies can affect the micro level decision-making of young people as they make choices about their lives. All that experience has come together in this thesis, where I attempt to examine how influencers and structural conditions play a role in educational choices, and why young adults pursue Modern Apprenticeship (MA) training in Scottish context.

My PhD studies are funded by Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and Skills Development Scotland (SDS). This funding was tied to a topic area and a location, which is one of the reasons why the research is conducted in Scottish vocational education context. Other reasons for the focus of the study being Scotland, and not my native country of Finland for example, is the intriguing state of policy in the study's area of interest. The flagship policy of DYW had been in force for approximately 5 years at the start of this study, which meant that many policy elements were meant to be fully in place at the time of data collection. Thus, timing for studying some elements of the policy on decision-making was opportune.

1.4 Outline of the study

This section discusses the research aims and questions of this thesis. The study has an overarching general research question that it seeks to answer through more specific research questions. The general research question is:

Why and how do young adults decide to pursue Modern Apprenticeship training?

As will be discussed in the literature review contained in Chapter 2, this question has been examined using various methodologies. The current study seeks to examine how macro-level and micro-level factors combined affect the young adults' decision making to go into an apprenticeship in the cases contained in the study. The macro-level factors consist of the apprenticeships system's features, accessibility, quality, and attractiveness. The micro-level debate consists of the longstanding sociological debate regarding the importance of agential and structural factors on young adults' educational decision-making.

The general research question is answered utilising specific research questions that target specific factors that might provide an answer to the general research question. These specific questions fall under the micro-level and macro-level aims for the study which are outlined below in that order. The micro-level research aim is outlined first.

1. *To investigate the aims reasons that young adults do an apprenticeship training program, how the young adults make these decisions, and what the role of key influencers is young adults' decision-making.*

The micro-level research aim is intended to investigate the reasons that young adults have when choosing apprenticeship training for themselves as well as the role of influencers in the decision-making process. The study is especially interested in the role of different influencers in influencing young adults. This is examined through following means: mapping out the different influencers – including their relationship with the decision-maker, the ways in which they exert influence, how young people interact with the influencer, and how the different forms of influence from various actors are prioritised and combined into a set of expectations and judgements about the options that young adults consider.

Ultimately the study's first aim is to better understand how young adults make educational choices and which social resources and influences they utilise in their decision-making. If the young adults in question have considered more than one path, then the study is interested why the apprenticeship option was chosen over the other potential options. This includes examining the reasons why some options are *not* considered fully or at all by the young adults, i.e. reasons for why the young adult would not have wanted to go directly to work or to further full-time study in a college or a university. The research questions arising from this aim are the following:

- What are the main reasons for young adults to seek apprenticeship training?
- Who are the key influencers to young adults and at what stages of their journeys?

- In what ways do the influencers affect young adults' decision-making about their post-compulsory education and training?

The second aim examines how policies supporting young adults' transitions from compulsory education to work or further education and training influence the young adults' choices.

2. *To examine the ways in which the policies and practices in place supporting young adults' transitions from school-to-work affect young adults' decision-making on pursuing MA training and how the practices support the execution of young adults' educational plans.*

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the policy in Scotland currently governing the transitions is Developing the Young Workforce (DYW). As discussed in chapter 3, the DYW strategy is part of a comprehensive reform of the Scottish VET system and thus the whole policy's effects are not within the scope of this study. The parts of the strategy that this study examined are ones that affect the structure of the apprenticeship pathway, the visibility of vocational options in schools, and the role of careers guidance.

The DYW policy is not only seeking to ensure that the young people continue into 'positive destinations' – education, further training, or work – but it is specifically seeking to bolster the vocational and work-based learning pathway into the labour market, which is perceived to be underutilised in its potential. As the strategy seeks to make apprenticeship pathway more popular (goal is to have 30,000 modern apprenticeship starts annually by 2021; (Scottish Government, 2014a) the research questions related to this aim pay attention to two aspects: Ff and how the changes to apprenticeship pathway affected young adults' interest in the apprenticeship option and; how the potential of the changed apprenticeship pathway is communicated to young adults and other relevant actors. Thus, I am interested in learning what how the policy measures influence young adults' choices to pursue apprenticeships and how the Careers Information, Advice, and Guidance support influences young adults' choices.

- How do institutional influencers support and influence young adults when planning and executing an approach to pursue post-school pathway choices?
- How are the DYW strategy elements, such as the partnership activities in schools – including the reformed apprenticeships pathway – influencing young adults' choices to pursue Modern Apprenticeships?

The research questions outlined above aim to capture the range of influences affecting decision-makers. This study recognises that these influences – which include structural socioeconomic factors and policies attempting to affect the young people's choices – are not passively affecting young people. Instead, they are exerted through and communicated by influencers.

The role of the key influencers is a central issue for the study, and I seek to examine the circumstances during which specific influencers are influential. For example, influencer like a career advisor might be especially well positioned to influence the young adults' decision-making under circumstances where the young adult does not have the resources for information elsewhere. Other influencers, such as parents, might be better influencing young adults' choices through emotional support but might play a key role as an information source under certain conditions. The ways in which young adults assimilate the influence from the different sources is not understood so far and that is what this study seeks to address.

Table 1.1. Research questions and summary of data sources

Research question	Data gathering tools	Participants and data sources
Who are the key influencers to young adults and at what stages of their journeys?	Semi-structured interviews 16 with young adults, 11 with institutional influencers, and 3 with policy experts	• Young adults 18-25 years old • Institutional influencers • Policy experts
What are the main reasons for young adults to seek apprenticeship training?	Semi-structured interviews	• Young adults 18-25 years old
In what ways do the influencers affect young adults' decision-making about their post-compulsory education and training?	Semi-structured interviews 16 with young adults, 11 with institutional influencers, and 3 with policy experts	• Young adults 18-25 years old • Institutional influencers Policy experts

How do institutional influencers support and influence young adults when planning and executing an approach to pursue post-school pathway choices?	Policy analysis Semi-structured interviews	• DYW policy strategy documentation (Scottish Government, 2014) • DYW commission documentation (Wood et al., 2014) • DYW annual reports • Young adults • Institutional influencers • Policy experts
How are the policy DYW policy elements, such as the partnership activities in schools – including the reformed apprenticeships pathway – influencing young adults' choices to pursue Modern Apprenticeships?	Policy analysis Semi-structured interviews	• DYW policy strategy documentation (Scottish Government, 2014) • DYW commission documentation (Wood et al., 2014) • DYW annual reports • Young adults • Institutional influencers

1.5 Theoretical perspective: a critical realist approach

This study adopts a critical realist approach to examine the topic and the research questions that are outlined in the previous section of this chapter. The critical realist perspective is credited to have been originated by Roy Bhaskar (Bhaskar, 2013) in field of philosophy, but it has subsequently become an influential approach in various fields that include sociology, economics, and international relations. However, probably the most influential theorist

especially in social sciences is Archer (Archer, 2012, 2010, 2007, 2003, 1995). Critical realism emerged amidst crises of the positivist approach in sciences in 1970s and 1980s (Archer et al., 2016). While the approach emerged from the positivist crises, it was not only developed as an alternative to positivism, which is focused on establishing laws and regularities about the natural and social world (Archer et al., 2016). The approach was also a response to constructivism, which in turn asserts that what scientists study is interpretations and understandings rather than underlying mechanisms (Archer et al., 2016). Situated somewhat in between the positivist and constructivist approaches, the critical realist approach asserts that there is an objective reality that researchers can study and it operates independently of our activity (Archer et al., 2016; Archer, 2003). In this way the realist part of critical realism is at the heart of the approach's ontology. Indeed, as Archer and colleagues (2016) put it, ontology is at the heart of the approach as it seeks to understand the social realities that we all are situated within. Questions that the critical realist approach is interested in includes issues of agency, structure, interactions between these and nature of causation in a social world (Archer et al., 2016; Archer, 2007, 1995).

If the realist part is thus at the heart of the ontological approach in this perspective, then critical part is at the heart of the epistemological approach. While the critical realist view asserts and assumes a relatively independent existence of social reality, the view suggests that our knowledge of the reality is always situated in historic, cultural, and social contexts (Archer et al., 2016). Like constructivist approaches, critical realists warn against being naïve to the effects of the contexts on how our knowledge is shaped. Thus, the approach adopts an epistemological relativism. The accounts and theories produced from research are limited and always from a certain perspective and historical context, making them fallible (Archer et al., 2016).

This combination of realist ontology and relativist epistemology poses challenges in judging which accounts of the world are better or worse than others. As Archer (2016) suggests, the aim of investigations into social reality is to create stable explanatory and descriptive accounts that are plausible models. However, all accounts are not equal when it comes to this and therefore, we should strive to use as objective reasons as we can to support one model over another.

Therefore, the approach adopted in this study asserts that there is a social reality that we observe in our research, but we need to be careful and reflexive when we describe it, attempt to infer causation, or try to model it. Chapter 4 contains a more detailed description of how

this theoretical approach is reflected in the in the qualitative research methodology and how the Critical realist approach is operationalised.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into 7 chapters. This introduction chapter has outlined the problem that the study is investigating, the questions it seeks to answer, and the theoretical perspective that the study has adopted to answer the questions.

The second chapter contains the literature review. The review is divided into three parts. The first part examines research on the phase of young adulthood, the way school-to-work transitions have changed, and research into concepts of skills and capabilities. The second part examines structures affecting decision-making. This includes an examination of skills production systems in different countries, the ways these systems affect pathway options, and the role that different influencers have been found to have in earlier research. The final part discusses three different theories about decision-making, which are Rational Choice Theory, the Bourdesian approach, and the Critical realist approach.

The third chapter outlines the context for this research. It contains an outline of the UK and Scottish skills systems. The chapter starts with a discussion about the UK wide skills and education policy prior to the devaluation of powers to the Scottish government, which allowed divergence of policies between Scotland and the rest of UK. The discussion will provide a general outline of the UK education and skills policies at the time but will examine the apprenticeships policies in more detail. This is followed by an examination of the extent to which Scotland the rest of the UK diverged regarding education and skills policies, and what has driven the changes and continuities. Finally, the chapter will finish with an examination of the Developing the Young Workforce strategy and the CIAG policies, which are of specific interest due to the research questions of this thesis.

The fourth chapter contains the details about the study's methodology. This includes an outline of the theoretical approach to the research, data collection methods, data-analysis, and any ethical considerations that need to be considered during the research.

The fifth chapter contains a discussion of the study's findings from the interviews conducted with the young adult participants. The discussion covers issues such as young adults aspirations and motivations to pursue MAs, the way influencers affected young adults'

decision-making, examination of young adults' reflexive decision-making and transition behaviours, and finally the key moments and contexts for the reflexive processes.

In the sixth Chapter I focus on the structural context in which the young adults made their decisions. The data discussed in this chapter consists of the young adult interviews as well as the interviews with the influencers and the policy experts. The discussion examines the key reflexive decision-making moments, the practices of the influencers in those moments, and how the actions of the influencers can influence young adults in the different stages. The discussion also includes an outline of the ways in which the Covid pandemic affected practice and what possible effects resulted from it.

The seventh chapter discusses the research questions of the study. This includes answering the research questions outlined earlier in this chapter, outlining the original contribution of this research, outlining implications of the findings for policy and practice in the topic area, and finally a discussion of the limitations of the study, potential future avenues for research, and a personal reflection of the PhD journey.

Chapter 2: Review of literature on young adults' educational decision-making and skills systems on educational choices

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature on young adults' educational choices, theories of decision-making and some relevant macro-economic structures affecting that decision-making. The discussion is conducted in three parts. The first part (2.2) consists of an examination of literature on some important concepts utilised in the study. This includes the period of young adulthood in Section 2.2.1, a discussion of the role of aspirations in young adults' educational decision-making in Section 2.2.2, and finally, concepts of skills and capabilities in Section 2.2.3.

The second part (2.3) shifts focus into how macro-level structural feature of different capitalist economies can structure young adults' decision making, and how influencers can affect young adults' decision-making in those structures. The discussion begins with an examination of two types macroeconomic structures, also called skills formation systems ("skills systems" from now on; Busemeyer and Trampusch 2011) in Section 2.3.1. Following that is an examination on some of the ways these skills systems frame young adults' transitions from school to work in Section 2.3.3. The part finishes with a look on research about influencers' effects on young adults' choices.

The third and final part of the literature review contains a discussion of three theories of young adults' educational decision-making (rational action theory, structuralist approach, and the critical realist approach) during their transitions from school to work. These three theories are discussed individually in Sections 2.4.1. – 2.4.3. The discussion outlines how each of these theoretical approaches have contributed to our understanding of people's decision-making, especially in educational context. Additionally, last of the three approaches forms the basis for the analytical framework of this study.

The literature search was conducted utilising different journal databases and publisher sites. These included Web of Science, Jstor, Taylor and Francis Group, Elsevier, and Sage websites and search engines. The used search terms included "Young adults" and "young people" combined with other key words. These included "decision-making", "career choices" "apprenticeships", and "influencers" (as well as specific influencers like parents, teachers, career(s) advisors). Additionally, search terms included the specific concepts and theories

utilised in the study, such as “critical realism”, “human capital theory”, “rational choice theory”, “capabilities approach”, and “varieties of capitalism”. Search terms like “structural”, “collectivistic” were also utilised to find literature specifically on structural factors, skills systems, and theories. Additional sources were also found from the reference lists of articles found through the search and by using the names of key theorists, such as Bourdieu and Archer.

2.2 Examination of important concepts for understanding young adults’ decision-making journeys

The literature review begins with an examination of youth and young adulthood in Section 2.2.1. As the study examines young adults’ decision-making, establishing what is meant by that term in this study and earlier research is crucial. That discussion is followed by an examination of the aspirations, which is an important element in understanding what the young adults seek to achieve through their choices. Finally, the concepts of skills and capabilities are examined in Section 2.2.3. These concepts are important for understanding the aims stated in different policies and strategies, as well as understanding what the young adults seek to achieve through their choices to pursue different forms of education and training.

2.2.1 Young adulthood as phase of transition and changes to that phase over time

Young people’s transitions to work have been examined in various fields, but one of the key ones is that of Youth Research. Despite the term ‘youth’ being in the name, it has not always been clear what youth or other terms such as young people, young adults, or emerging adults mean. This is because the concepts of youth and adulthood differ between cultures and time periods (Côté and Bynner, 2008). In the youth studies research literature youth is often conceptualised as a phase of life between childhood and adulthood (Côté and Bynner, 2008; Furlong et al., 2011). While the concept of youth is conceptually tied to a specific age range in most Western countries, it is nonetheless based on a social expectation of behaviours rather than being tied to a physical age (Wyn and White, 2015). Indeed, the expected behaviours and responsibilities set on young people have changed over time. One suggested reason for this is that youth as a phase has become longer in societies in the post-industrial era as the transitions from school to employment have become longer (Furlong et al., 2011).

In addition to the youth period arguably being longer than before, it is also sometimes divided into early and late youth (Furlong, Woodman & Wyn, 2011). This study focuses on the latter half as it is when decisions about one's future are expected to be made in contemporary Scottish and UK education and skills systems. This phase has also been called 'early adulthood'(Côté and Bynner, 2008). One definition for early adulthood is that a person is on the way to adulthood and independence but does not yet have all the commitments that are considered a part of full adulthood (Côté and Bynner, 2008).

While this phase is usually defined through social expectations, some researchers like Arnett (2000) have argued that the early adulthood is its distinct developmental phase with roots to more than changed economic and social conditions. Arnett (2000) argues that 'emerging adulthood' is an addition to Erikson's (1968) stages of development. It is located after the adolescence phase and is when young people develop to adults. However, young adulthood term is commonly used as a metaphor rather than referring to a distinct developmental stage (Evans, 2007; Furlong et al., 2011; Warren, 2007). The term is also used as a metaphor for this phase of transition in young people's lives in this study.

Earlier studies have suggested that this transition period into full 'adulthood' has extended over time. For example in Canada the transitions of young adults were examined via five different transitions which include leaving school, leaving parents' home, holding a full-time occupation for a full year, being in a conjugal relationship, and having children (Warren, 2007).

Prior research suggests that the lengthening of transitions is not new and has taken place since the baby boom generation (Côté and Bynner, 2008; Warren, 2007). However, the transition patterns are not universal (Bynner, 2005; Hendry and Kloep, 2010). As the early adulthood phase is defined through social expectations of behaviours, it is arguable the prolongment of the transition is experienced differently by people in different social positions. Côté & Bynner (2008) for example suggest for that servant classes in the UK often met the definition of 'early adulthood' in the past as their opportunities to fulfil some of the requirements of full adulthood were limited compared to more affluent people. As such, it is argued that the prolonged youth and the conditions of early adulthood are now affecting more people than in the past and thus it has become recognised as a 'new' phenomenon (Côté and Bynner, 2008).

Indeed, some earlier studies have suggested there are multiple transitions (Brunila et al., 2011) and establishing a normative 'correct' transition to young adults' lives might not only be unnecessary but hard to evidence.

While the concept of young adult is tied to norms and behaviours, for the purposes of research there are general age brackets associated with the young adulthood. This study uses an age range between 18-25, which captures majority of the people in their transitions from school-to-work in Scotland. This is also the age range that has been used in earlier research by for example Evans (2007).

As youth and young adulthood are concepts tied to transitions in society, it is also worth examining how the transitions in Western societies have changed over time. Evans and Furlong (1997) examined the youth transitions from 1960s to 1990s and noted a shift from relatively structured transitions that integrated the young people into their occupational 'niches' into more complex and less structured transitions. This change appeared to be a result of rising youth employment in the 1970s, and resulted in metaphors of 'routes' and 'pathways' used to describe the transitions (Evans and Furlong, 1997; Furlong, 2009).

These changes have in some ways continued since then. Indeed, some have argued that school and work have become increasingly decoupled, and the transitions have become increasingly uncertain (Heinz, 2009). Young adults on average spend more time on education and often find themselves affected by precarious and insecure employment (Wyn, 2014). Thus, even when young adults might have worked for a year or more after school, they might not have advanced on the career path that they are pursuing. As such, these transitions to work can also be complex, involving numerous choices and readjustments.

Whether using 'pathways', 'trajectories', or other metaphors, the transitions have arguably become less structured over time. However, even relatively recently 1 in 2 young people experienced straightforward transitions to work (Biggart et al., 2008; Furlong, 2009). This is an important element considered in the theories of decision-making, discussed in Part 2.4.

2.2.2 Role of aspirations in understanding educational decision-making

This study examines the overall process of educational decision-making. This includes making a career choice, deciding how to pursue it (different pathways, like apprenticeships, college, and university), and successfully entering the chosen pathway. Aspirations are an important concept in understanding why young adults make certain choices and are used in

this study to understand reasons behind educational choices. Their usage in past research is discussed in this section and their use in the current study is further elaborated in Chapter 4.

However, before delving into the concept of aspirations in detail, I wish to acknowledge that there is also a wider literature on the role of motivations in life choices which includes educational choices. The literature in that area ranges from psychological to educational and sociological research and has for example examined how motivations can affect educational outcomes and how motivation patterns are gendered (Meece et al., 2006; Rogelberg et al., 2021). While the literature on motivations is rich and, in many ways, relevant, this research focuses more narrowly on aspirations going forward due to aspirations' specific relevance for the study's research questions.

Aspiration have been viewed as a conceptual tool that can be used to structure and frame young adults' thinking about their future options. One of the ways aspirations have been framed in recent studies is as a concept which encompasses; decision-maker's perception of different opportunity structures; their contextual situation during the decision-making phase; the values and meanings a person views the world through; and the motivations and things that a person values (Sumberg, 2021). However, in literature on aspirations there is no unambiguous definition of the concept. In different studies aspirations have been framed as hoped, desired, preferred, or even dreamed projections of self and one's condition in future (Hardgrove et al., 2015; Hart, 2012; Sumberg, 2021). The concept is also often discussed through the concept of capability, which is discussed further in the following section.

Crucially, aspirations differ from plans, or intentions of action. Aspirations can be less firm, more ambitious than something a decision-maker might be making plans for, and less connected to practical challenges they might be facing in practice (Aldinucci et al., 2021). This distinction has been suggested for example by Brannen and Nilsen (2007) in order to not conflate plans with the less firm and more uncertain aspirations.

Aspirations as desired and hoped states of being thus can be used to better understand what the young adults wish to achieve. As such, they are an important driver in decision-making. Importantly, aspiration formation appears to be connected to the narratives present in a society about opportunities and how these opportunities can be achieved by everyone through meritocratic structures like education (Aldinucci et al., 2021). Due to these narratives, people can form 'high' aspirations despite not being in a situation where those aspirations are likely to be realisable due to structural restrictions (Aldinucci et al., 2021).

One of the ways through which young adults' professional aspirations has been examined is to distinguish between aspirations *for* and *through* education, an approach adopted from migration studies (Aldinucci et al., 2021; Carling and Collins, 2018). This approach provides a more nuanced understanding of why someone might wish to go to university for example. The person might have aspirations *for* university, as in they wish to attend university for reasons that it provides, such as status, qualifications, or skills, or *through* university, where the centre of the aspirations resides in destination beyond university in, for example, dream career (Aldinucci et al., 2021).

The focus in this study is especially on young adults' professional and career aspirations, as those elements are relevant for understanding educational choices. The examination of aspirations involved understanding what the young adults wished to achieve and which actions and choices they took to achieve those aspirations. Analysing those elements provided a fuller picture of the meanings that the educational choices had for the decision-makers. This includes understanding whether the MA training choice in Scotland enables the young adults' aspirations or how it provides an alternative amidst barriers that the young adults navigate.

2.2.3 The concept of skills and capabilities

In this section I will examine two theoretical approaches to conceptualising skills and why young people try to achieve skills. The approaches are Human Capital Theory (HCT) and the Capabilities Approach (CA). Each approach has different implications for why people seek education, and why they seek skills.

Human Capital Theory and skills as resources

HCT is an economic theory that has also been utilised in sociological research. It has become an influential theory and the central concept of human capital is used by various countries and international organisation in framing issues like education and economic growth (Burgess, 2016; OECD, 2001; World Bank, 2020).

At its core, HCT argues that human knowledge and skills are a form of resource (human capital) which can be translated into economic value (Nafukho et al., 2004). Thus, human capital is a concept that seeks to capture, in a very individualistic sense, person's economic prospects both now and in future when discounted to the person's present time (Green, 2013). While the definition of HCT has varied across notable authors since the 1960's (Nafukho et

al., 2004), the core elements of the theory have remained steady. Skills, and human capital more broadly, are usually seen in productivist terms in HCT. This means, that investment in skills is an investment in increased performance on a personal level, increased and increased productivity on an organisational level (Nafukho et al., 2004). In HCT, the improvements in productivity and societal economic growth necessarily follow investments in human capital, and as such the development of skills is theorised to lead into creation of jobs (Bonvin, 2019).

However, the specific nature or type of the skills is not important in this human capital view. If the skill can be used in one or multiple contexts where it is valued, it is a part of person's human capital. While the actual form of skills or knowledge is not a factor that affects its valuation in terms of capital, the range and applications of its utility can affect the skill's valuation as it is based on the economic output that can be derived from the skill (Green, 2013). Thus, the value of the skills is derived entirely from its utilitarian function in a specific context, which on a societal level has often meant the utilitarian value in the labour market.

Skills then are much like any other financial capital in HCT, a resource that can be used to achieve a competitive advantage. While the view is common in policy and in different fields of research, it has not is not without its criticisms in economics and other fields of social sciences (McGrath et al., 2020). Indeed, as will be discussed in Part 2.4., it is not uncommon to consider things other than economic resources as capital in social sciences. Bourdieu's three capitals are a popular analytical tool alongside the rest of the Bourdesian toolkit and are broadly used in various fields (Grenfell, 2012).

Another critique of the human capital is that the unique characteristics it possesses compared to economic capital are not often considered in the original formulation (Green, 2013). Unlike economic capital, human capital is distinctly bound to a person and the context they inhabit. Its acquisition, utilisation and valuation are all socially influenced and dependent on their societal application (Green, 2013). This means that skills acquisition choices are not made in a social vacuum. Recent studies have found for example that reasons young adults aspire to gain specific skills is related to personal intrinsic preferences towards fields, rather than choices being based purely on economic considerations (Aldinucci et al., 2021). Additionally, as will be discussed in Part 2.4. and throughout this thesis, people's choices are potentially influenced by one's social circle, resources of various types, and opportunities available in the location that the person inhabits (Atkinson, 2010a; Green, 2013).

The human capital theory proposes reasons for why people seek human capital, and how they are used in a society. First, as stated earlier, the theory is focused on the individual and their primary goal in the theory to maximise their earnings, reflecting the Rational Choice Theories of decision-making (Oliver et al., 2019; Pantea, 2020). Investment in human capital in form of skills or knowledge is then seen as an investment in future earnings potential. This is how the individual's motives are viewed in the classical version of the theory. Employers, and society more generally is suggested to benefit from the individual's investment in skills through increased productivity. For societies then, providing sufficient levels of skills to meet the demands of the labour market is important for prosperity (Burgess, 2016; European Commission, 2019).

When the human capital theory gained popularity between 1950s and 1970s there was an expansion of demand for highly educated labour resulting in good employment outcomes for graduates (Marginson, 2019). It seemed that the demand for highly educated labour kept increasing and absorbed the supply of the skills (Marginson, 2019). As graduates then experienced gains in their personal incomes, which was paired with the assumption that their productivity and output to society increased similarly, the development saw human capital becoming a key element that societies paid attention to. Human capital was even argued to be the determining factor of economic growth and personal well-being (Marginson, 2019). Therefore, in the theory, the core issue for society regarding skills and human capital is all about managing the supply to meet the demand in the labour market. This approach has provided the conceptual grounding for the market model for skills formation (Valiente et al., 2019). The market, or markets of skills supply and demand have individuals demanding education and training from different educational providers, whether public or private depending on the market arrangements (Valiente et al., 2019).

As with any market, the theoretical equilibrium is a perfect match of skills demand and supply. However, in practice there are several forms of skills mismatches in the market. Skills mismatches are common in most countries, and each of them has different implications for labour market issues (Reymen et al., 2015). These mismatches include for example skills shortages, skills gaps, and skills under-utilisation, and labour market issues like unemployment (Green, 2013; Reymen et al., 2015). The HCT's assumptions about personal enrichment (Oliver et al., 2019; Pantea, 2020) would posit that such factors in the labour market steer the people towards the sectors where there is a lack of skills, rather than sectors where there is underutilisation of skills, as the potential for benefits is greater if one gets to

use the skills and risk is higher if one is likely to not be able to utilise the skills they invested time and money in.

However, the state also has a role in the market. In the neoliberal approach that has prioritised the role of the state in supply side, the role of the state has become to manage the skills mismatches that are produced in the free market (Bonal, 2003; Valiente et al., 2019). This applies also to the main policy examined in this thesis, and the analysis of the issues that the policy seeks to address is outlined in chapter 3.

One of the main critiques against the human capital theory is that it is treating people as rational decision makers seeking to maximise their income and economic output (Marginson, 2019). This is related to the conceptualising of human capital as something abstract and separate of social forces and values. This ignores other factors in decisions involving skills, which the capabilities approach seeks to address. This weakness of HCT has been acknowledged by the structuralist researchers, critical realist researchers, and even some RCT theorists (Bonal and Zancajo, 2018; Boudon, 2003).

Finally, some assumptions of the human capital theory appear to not work in practice. In Chile for example, the extreme neoliberal education market has resulted in inflated supply of skills in some vocational specialisation markets as the demand for the supply has not manifested (Valiente et al., 2019). Additionally, the lack of coordination between employers and educational providers has led to a disconnect in the supply and demand of occupational skills (Valiente et al. 2019). This means that even if the individual attempted to match their skills to the perceived need, it would be hard to do in practice if the information they receive from those providing the skills is inaccurate.

Skills as capabilities and functionings in the Capabilities Approach

In contrast to the HCT's focus on skills as a form of capital, the Capabilities Approach (CA) focuses on the benefit of skills on the individual's well-being. The CA approach is a theoretical framework about well-being, development, and justice, which has been used widely in various fields in both humanities and social sciences (Crocker and Robeyns, 2009; Robeyns, 2016). The pioneering of the approach is commonly credited to Economist and philosopher Amartya Sen (Sen, 1985) as well as Martha Nussbaum (Nussbaum, 1988, 2011).

In philosophical research CA was designed to be a framework for normative exercises, such as assessment of wellbeing, or evaluation of social arrangements and design of policies (Crocker and Robeyns, 2009; McGrath et al., 2020; Robeyns, 2016). As such the approach

does not just focus on an outcome like material economic growth for individuals or countries (Oliver et al., 2019). The CA has several significant concepts, but the key ones are capabilities and functionings. Capabilities refers to freedoms, or real opportunities, for people to do and be what they value (Robeyns, 2016; Sen, 2005). Functionings refers to the person's 'being and doing' that the person can undertake (Robeyns, 2016; Sen, 2005). If simplified, in this sense the capabilities refer to opportunities and functionings refer to outcomes. Functionings do not necessarily need to be positive, although positive functionings are often the goal for example in policy. Examples of functionings range from being well-nourished, living in a comfortable abode to travelling or voting (Robeyns, 2016, 2006).

When used in interpersonal comparisons, as the framework is often used, functionings refers to achieved well-being, whereas capabilities refers to the freedom to pursue well-being (Robeyns, 2016, 2006). Using this approach, the ends examined in research, such as well-being, justice, or development, should be conceptualised through people's capabilities instead of focusing on just the outcomes (Robeyns, 2006). These capabilities should not be considered just as individual opportunities, such as sufficient resources to go to a college, but as a combination of factors to see which functionings are open to the individual across all the required freedoms (Robeyns, 2016).

In issues related to career choices, the CA focus away from skills as economic benefit to a broader conceptualisation of capabilities, within which skills are situated. For example, to advance on one's career one needs certain, skills, like language, mathematics and even skill to navigate education and labour markets. This is combined with the need to different economic and social resources that allow them the space to pursue different careers as well as gain the required information to make choices (Oliver et al., 2019).

Examining the concept of skills utilising the capabilities approach can be done various ways, depending on what level of the issue we are interested in. Skills can be a capability to achieve a functionings. For example, if a person aspires for a specific job role, having the skills required for the role are just one of the capabilities that are needed. Alternatively, we can examine the needed capabilities to acquire the skills, which would mean the ability to navigate through the different educational options in Scotland. They would also need to have the means to pursue those skills and to have other elements in their life in a sufficiently good order to do that.

Capabilities approach research has regarded education as a core capability, meaning that it is fundamental to enhancing and achieving other capabilities and functionings (Dejaeghere, 2020). This branch of research has examined how education can enhance individual's agency and wellbeing, and how different social forces act in promoting or restricting these desires outcomes (Dejaeghere, 2020). In her 2020 paper, Dejaeghere expands the concept of capabilities from being a purely individualistic characteristic to examining how social environments and social dynamics work to influence the realisation of the capabilities. While Dejaeghere and colleagues have utilised this approach primarily in examining how the structural factors have affected power relations, availability of schooling and reproduction of inequalities, the approach is relevant to the issue examined in this study.

Of special interest regarding the young adults' decision-making is the issue of what the young people value, what they seek to achieve through their educational decision-making, and what support is available to enable the conversion of capabilities into functionings. Therefore, the capabilities approach can be used to interrogate how (and which) skills, knowledge, and qualifications are valued by the young adults (Aldinucci et al., 2021; Carling and Collins, 2018). As discussed earlier in this section, one of the approaches utilised examines the way the young adults do not necessarily aspire for educational qualifications for their own sake, but for what they enable *through* the university qualifications examined in the (Aldinucci et al., 2021; Carling and Collins, 2018).

Capabilities approach has also examined the concept of agency itself. Researchers such as DeJaeghere, McCleary, and Josić (2016) have interrogated the concept of agency and how social relations interact with agency in order to achieve educational equity. This is also a central issue in debates about young adults' transitions to the labour market. The approach taken by DeJaeghere and colleagues combines the capabilities approach with the Bourdesian approach. The study is notable for the way it examines agency's role for achieving functionings and capabilities as it interacts with the resources contained in a person's social environment, and thus the resources become a part of the conversion factors, including different peoples and social resources becoming social conversion factors (DeJaeghere et al., 2016).

As such, the CA enables us to examine decision-making in different ways. First, understanding what the young adults aspire to achieve and second, whether they have the other required capabilities and conversion factors in their environment to convert the aspiration into the desired career. This helps can help us interrogate the enablements and

barriers in the young adults' journeys for skills and qualification in pursuit of their aspirations.

2.3 Skills, skills systems and the role of VET

As the literature review above has already begun to elucidate, structures that a young person occupies are important in young adults' transitions from school-to-work and in the decision-making involved in the transition (Brunila et al., 2011; Evans and Furlong, 1997; Furlong, 2009). One of the important factors involves the macroeconomic structure of the countries, which affect which skills are prioritised and valued, and how they are produced (Valiente et al., 2019).

This section examines different kinds of skills systems and how those systems can affect decision-making for example through prominence of certain pathways. The types of skills systems discussed in this come from the Varieties of Capitalism approach (Busemeyer and Trampusch, 2011a; Hall and Soskice, 2001a; Hall and Thelen, 2009), which has produced different typologies of capitalist economies. These typologies contain specific features that indicate what roles different entities like state, businesses, and unions have in the labour market, as well as how different actors contribute to the production and utilisations of skills. The focus in the examination of the skills systems is to outline some key features of the different skills systems and how these features have been found to affect young adults' decision-making.

2.3.1 Skills formation through different skills systems

Different societal arrangements and economies produce and utilise skills differently. In HCT perspective, the skills systems in societies provide the skills utilised in the labour market. This is often framed as investing into the human capital in the dominant policy discourses, as discussed in the subsection about skills in the previous section.

Before going into the different types of skills systems, I wish to highlight that the skills systems are not only focused on the school-to-work transitions which are the focus of this study. The long-term, continuous educational structures are formalised via educational policies in skills systems, and consist of policies such as lifelong learning (LLL; Bonnafous 2014; Lowden et al. 2016).

However, while LLL encompasses continued education throughout people's lives, in practice the LLL policies in Europe shifted focus towards that young adults' transitions over time, in

part to address youth unemployment concerns (Lowden et al., 2016). Similarly the focus in LLL has been on economically useful skills and qualification despite the LLL being originally a broader concept of learning over lifetime (Tikkanen and Nissinen, 2016; Valiente et al., 2020a, 2020b). As such, the focus of LLL has shifted towards the priorities of HCT discussed in the earlier section.

One of the ways that kinds of capitalist economies have been categorised into typologies is using the Varieties of Capitalism (VoC) approach. This approach was pioneered by Hall and Soskice (Hall and Soskice, 2001b), and has since been developed by different authors. Notable examples include Busemeyer, Trampusch, and Vossiek (Busemeyer and Trampusch, 2011a; Busemeyer and Vossiek, 2016; Trampusch, 2010) who all contributed to the development of the VoC approach.

The typologies are not entirely the same between the authors. In Hall and Soskice's book "Varieties of Capitalism", the authors set out two distinct types of market economies in capitalist states: liberal market economies (LMEs) and coordinated market economies (CMEs). The work of Hall and Soskice emphasised five different factors where LMEs and CMEs differed from each other (ibid.). One of the key features is the relationship between state, companies, and unions. Union membership rates are generally higher in CMEs than in LMEs, and subsequently the power of unions is higher in CMEs. This has implications on wage bargaining power of the employees, but also on the roles that each of these actors has on the systems that provide skills. This includes the formation of vocational cultures, which is tied to who sponsor, participates, and works within the vocational education sphere (Billett, 2014).

The second feature – a key one for understanding the context for this study – is the prioritisation of vocational education and training, i.e., focus on job specific skills, versus emphasis on general and transferable skills. CMEs tend to value vocational skills that are tied to industry or even a company higher than LMEs. Conversely, LMEs tend to value general skills that are easily transferable to other companies, or even sectors. Like the first factor, this contributes to the creation of different perceptions and valuations of vocational education (Billett, 2014).

The other factors highlighted by Hall and Soskice are to do with relative short- or long-term focus of companies, relations between companies, and relations within companies between managers and employers. While all these factors contribute to the differentiation of the two

types of economies in Hall and Soskice's typology, the first two factors are most important for understanding the effects of the macro-economic structures on young adults' decision-making.

The work of Hall and Soskice has been developed further by other researchers who have devised their own typologies that build on the earlier work. One such version was developed by Busemeyer and Trampusch (2011), which outlined four different types of capitalist skills systems. These four are comprised of liberal, segmentalist, collective, and statist skills systems. Their work focuses on examining how different parts of society contribute to the formation of skills (Busemeyer and Trampusch 2011). This follows the original VoC approach in being firm-centric viewpoint, but with a specific emphasis on the roles of the firms, associations, and the state in the different systems.

Busemeyer and Trampusch detail the different forms of capitalist skills systems in their "The Political Economy of Collective Skills Formation" book. In their formulation liberal systems are characterised by low public commitment to vocational training, as well as low involvement of firms in the initial vocational training. Instead, in liberal systems skills are largely provided through general education system and through markets (Busemeyer and Trampusch 2011, p13). This system has an emphasis on generic qualifications on initial training, which are complemented by firms through on-the-job training for a specific task at the start of employment. This does not mean that there is no vocational training available in liberal skills systems. Instead, these pathways tend not to be valued highly or have limited linkages to businesses (Busemeyer and Trampusch 2011). Additionally, students are usually responsible for the costs of training in these institutions.

Busemeyer and Trampusch (2011) also have the collective skills formation regime in their typology, much like Hall and Soskice (2001) These systems are characterised by high investment to VET by both the public actors and the companies, making it the most heavily invested system into VET. In these systems, companies and state, labour unions and other organisational representatives collaborate in design of the skills system. Companies invest in training of specific vocational skills and in on-the-job training, but they also get to influence the training in more ways than in the statist or the liberal systems (Bosch and Charest, 2008; Hall and Soskice, 2001b). Possibly the most cited example of a collective skills system is the dual system in Germany, although other countries such as Austria and Switzerland have similar systems (Deissinger, 2015; Lassnigg, 2011; Trampusch, 2010).

The two new systems introduced in the Busemeyer and Trampusch formulation were segmentalist and statist systems, latter of which was already briefly mentioned. In many ways they are the opposites of each other. Segmentalist systems focus on publicly providing general education and skills, leaving the vocational skills production to companies, which are heavily invested in doing so. This extent of training provided by companies is what differentiates segmentalist systems from liberal ones. Whereas in liberal systems new employees might experience some narrow on-the-job training to perform their tasks, in segmentalist systems the new employees go through a more extensive training. This training can involve job rotation schemes, in-house and off-the-job training to completement the on-the-job training, as well as courses in vocational schools. A common example of a segmentalist skills system is Japan, where the companies invest a lot in their employees' skills through mechanisms outlined above (Busemeyer and Trampusch 2011).

In contrast, statist systems have a high public commitment to VET but companies do not invest in skills formation as much and instead rely on the state to provide the required skills (Busemeyer and Trampusch 2011). In these systems vocational education is seen as a more viable or equivalent alternative to academic higher education relative to the liberal systems, although often the VET offering is still targeted towards those with weaker academic qualifications. Notably, VET can be integrated extensively in the general education systems. While there are workplace-based components in the vocational qualifications, they tend to be limited. In some sense the companies have become 'consumers' of state provided skills supply that they benefit from, but do not necessarily have much say over (Busemeyer and Trampusch 2011).

It is worth noting that none of these systems are static but have changed and are changing over time. Kathleen Thelen (2004) has for example worked on investigating how these different systems emerged over time from the different relations that unions (and other union-like organisations), employers, and the state had with each other. As such, these typologies are shifting over time, albeit usually gradually and slowly.

The skills systems in the different categories outlined above differ substantially, but even systems that are considered part of the same typology can differ significantly. As seen in the outline of the systems above, there is great variation across these systems. For this study, the most relevant systems are the liberal (LMEs) and the collectivistic (CMEs) systems. This is due to the UK, and Scotland, featuring the LME traits. However, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, Scotland has sought to involve employers in their vocational education, similarly

to how employers in CMEs do, and they are in many ways picking European CME comparison points for themselves in the DYW strategy. This is again showing that these systems evolve over time(Hall and Thelen, 2009; Thelen, 2004a). Indeed, today the Scottish and the English systems have some notable differences whereas they were very similar only around 20 years ago (Arnott and Menter, 2007; Payne, 2009; Raffe et al., 2001b) . The next section examines the differences that these broad differences in systems can cause in educational cultures, structures, and choices in practice.

2.3.2 Skills systems structuring pathways to work

The formation and availability of skills, and human capital, are structured and reflected by the institutional context of a skills system (Bosch and Charest 2008; Busemeyer and Trampusch 2011; Thelen 2004). As such, the choice to pursue specific skills is not just a matter of rational choices, since the valued and offered human capital and skills differ from one system to another (Busemeyer and Trampusch 2011).

The key feature of the skills systems for this study is their focus and valuation of vocational versus general skills. This is important, as it limits availability of specific opportunities and pathways in practice, as well as shaping the information and attitudes that the young adults might face about the pathways.

Collective systems (CMEs) are marked by a strong occupational orientation. A good example of such system is the German ‘Dual-System’ (Deissinger, 2015, 1996). In Germany this means that the skills and competencies of graduates from the VET institutions are based on specified criteria that defines the conditions of training as well as assessment (Deissinger, 2019a). The result is a qualification that is highly relevant and valued by the employers and one that also provides value for the person doing the qualification. The dual system consists of two components: training at a vocational education institution, such as vocational school, and training at a company (Deissinger, 2019a; Hoxtell, 2019). Thus, the apprenticeship training in dual system combines both classroom-based and work-based learning. The approach has resulted in a comparably comprehensive education and training in a dual system, rather than being training aimed strictly for occupational skills (Brockmann and Laurie, 2016a).

The dual system – so called due to its combination of vocational schooling and firm-based training (Heinz, 2000) is characterised by a strong involvement from employers, the state, and unions, which are core elements of CMEs (Busemeyer and Trampusch 2011; Deissinger

2019). The strong buy-in by the different parties, as well as cultural importance of *Beruf* -- or occupations – have both contributed to the status of vocational schooling as a respected alternative to more academically oriented education (Billett, 2014; Deissinger, 2019a). This means that young adults have an established route to follow into highly valued professional occupational tracks.

As young people within the dual system are already part of a training company, this approach is viewed to be a way to bridge compulsory school-based education and world-of-work, while at the same time providing high levels of relevant skills for the employers (Deissinger 2019). As will be discussed in the next Chapter, the Developing the Young Workforce strategy seeks to introduce similarly apprenticeship-based elements into schools to bridge the gap between work and education, but there are several key differences that result in the system still being liberal with influences from the collective systems.

These structured and protected vocational tracks to valued occupations are not present the same way in the liberal systems. The UK is a good example of a liberal skills system. Although the UK is comprised of four nations – England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland – in the VoC typology UK is considered a single unit. The reason for that is that despite their differences, the UK skills systems share several fundamental characteristics. What explains this similarity is that, the four skills systems have, until relatively recent devolution developments, been governed from Westminster (Payne, 2009).

Focusing on the vocational versus general education differences between the LMEs and CMEs, The UK is a good example of an LME where emphasis is placed on generic higher education versus vocational education and training. For example, there is a relatively low investment in vocational skills in the UK from both the state and the businesses (Hall and Soskice, 2001b).

The emphasis on the generic skills is arguably a result of the structural features of an LME like the UK. In liberal systems labour is relatively easy to poach from companies by competitors, so the incentives to provide a lot of in-house training are limited. Studies conducted on apprenticeships experiences in the UK reflect this in part, as apprentices did not always complete their training in a company as they were going to be paid more for just full-time work at a competitor (Sims, 2004). As Sims' (2004) study shows, the employers have no guarantees that they will retain the workers that they train, which is one disincentive to

provide such training. This can be a problem especially in sectors like retail, where Sims' study was situated.

However, LMEs like the UK place a strong emphasis on generic education. The liberal approach had been expected to become the dominant system by advocates of knowledge economy theories, which emphasise the value of building up knowledge and transferable skills in lieu of specific skills for individuals (Livingstone, 2012). The investment in the 'knowledge economy' and generic skills has left the VET a relatively minor role in the skills system. While the vocational education and training forms are present in the UK, they are not seen to be as prestigious (Brockmann and Laurie, 2016a; Fuller and Macfadyen, 2012; Misko et al., 2007). The higher valuation of knowledge over job specific skills, coupled with the other features of liberal skills systems has resulted to a 'low skills equilibrium' where neither the state nor the employers have invested heavily in skills (Busemeyer & Trampusch, 2011).

This equilibrium has implications for the attractiveness of VET to young adults. This includes issues with attracting the desired number of applicants, as well as forms of VET like apprenticeships becoming viewed as a lesser form of qualification even by those that consider applying (Ryan and Lőrinc, 2018). Thus, as we will see in chapter 3, VET in systems like the UK is occupying a secondary status to higher education and numerous rounds of reforms have attempted to rectify. These attempts are done in order to address skills mismatches, which in the so called "Leitch Review" was identified to be partially due to lack of attractive pathways to intermediate- and high-skilled jobs through a vocational pathway(Leitch, 2006; Payne, 2009; Winch, 2013). However, the issues with the perceptions of VET pathways as secondary options persist (Ryan and Lőrinc, 2018).

Structural effects of pathing and transition behaviours

Besides examining the broad effects of the systems on the prestige of the pathways, I wanted to also examine the effects that the ways the systems are organised on young adults' transition behaviours. The issue has been examined in various studies, but studies by Evans and colleagues (Evans, 2007, 2002; Evans and Heinz, 1993; Heinz, 2000; Rudd and Evans, 1998) have specifically compared transitions between Germany and England, making their studies relevant for the effects of the structural features.

The transitions in the English context, both the young people and their parents often saw a fast or 'accelerated' transition to employment and independence as the most preferable option

(Evans, 2007, 2002; Evans and Heinz, 1993). Education that was done instead of work was not attractive especially to the young people from working-class backgrounds. However, extended vocational training and other forms of education were seen as a way to ascend to a higher status more quickly, in part serving the establishment of independence and career trajectory (Evans, 2007). The German system contained more structures for socialization of the young adults into their occupational roles, and the transitions were more protracted (Evans, 2007; Evans and Heinz, 1993). This also reflects the findings that the German dual system seeks to educate young adults more broadly, whereas the English apprenticeship education focused more on vocational training (Bathmaker, 2013; Deissinger, 2019b).

The factors above were coupled with a discursive message about the relative responsibilities of the young person making the transition and the skills system providing the routes and opportunities. In England, the discourses centred the responsibility onto the young people, and it was easy for young people to blame themselves about any issues in their transition (Evans, 2007).

These structural differences were found to impact how young adults approached their transitions. Evans and colleagues examined these approaches through 'transition behaviours' (Evans, 2007; Evans and Heinz, 1993). These transition behaviours are divided into four different categories or approaches, which are "strategic", "taking chances", "step by step", and "wait and see" (Evans, 2007). Evans' research indicated that different behaviours were encouraged in different countries' skills systems, or at the very least different factors resulted in the adoption of different behaviours. Where the structural support was providing social support in case failures, 'taking chances' approaches were seen to be the best approach to quickly progress on one's goals. Whereas when young adults could not control the timeline of their educational progression – either due to educational structure reasons in Germany or unpredictable market conditions in England – the 'step-by-step' and 'wait and see' approaches were more prevalent (Evans, 2007).

Thus, the behaviours can be seen as being influenced by structures (and actors within those structures). This is as structures frame how the aspirations and choices of young adults can or 'should' be achieved in the conventional sense and how risk is perceived for different options. The approach does not explain the rationale behind the choices, which is why this theoretical framing is used alongside the concept of aspirations and as well as alongside a theory social decision-making theory, which are discussed in the next part.

2.3.3 The role of influencers in young adults' educational decision-making

This section examines the role of influencers and different types of information in young adults' educational decision-making. Influencers are people who influence other people in some way. However, instead of influencers as celebrities, this study focuses on influencers as agents who exert structural effects already discussed in this Chapter on young adults and thus influence their educational choices.

Influencers in educational decision-making are individuals – or communities, such as organisational communities – who have an ongoing relationship with young people. Additionally, they are in a position to contribute to the educational and vocational decision-making and success of an individual pursuing those options (D'Angelo and Dollinger, 2021). Examples of important, or key influencers, who have been examined in studies include carers (parents, guardians), community leaders, and broader supportive networks (D'Angelo and Dollinger, 2021).

Influencers have been examined in various studies, but there has not been an accepted conventional way to categorise different influencers. One way to divide influencers – conceptualised as social resources – has been done by (Hirschi, 2007; Kamm et al., 2020), who discussed social influencing social resources in personal (including parental and social networks), school-based (career guidance lessons, other career related activities in schools), institutional (for example formal career guidance), and information sources (including internet sources) (Hirschi, 2007; Kamm et al., 2020). This study uses the Hirschi's categorisation as a basis but simplifies the influencers into two groups: personal and institutional influencers. The school-based and institutional influencers are combined into one since, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, the career guidance activities are a crucial part of the teaching activities, and the career guidance occurs predominantly in schools until the young adults leave school. Therefore, dividing the influencers into two separate group in that context would be difficult and possibly not useful. Information sources is also a consideration in the study and will be discussed separately as part of this section.

Personal influencers are connected to the young adult through their personal social networks and are thus linked to the young adults' social capital (Ball, 2002; Yoon, 2020). Examples of such influencers are carers, relatives, and peers. These groups provide influence through social interactions as well as well as via cultural and material means – especially in case of carers.

Institutional influencers in the past studies have been conceptualised as social resources tied to an institutional structure but accessible to the young adults (Hirschi, 2007; Kamm et al., 2020). In the formulation used in this study, the institutional influencers are people who provide information and might even explicitly try to steer the young adults towards specific careers. Examples of these influencers include company recruiters/representatives, teachers, and career advisors.

Both categories of influencers are part of the socially constructed structures that the young adults inhabit. In these contexts, influencers shape the social setting through information and actions. For example, in schools the attitudes of the teachers could affect how they present pathway options to the young adults, which is an action that shapes the information that the young adults have regarding their post-school options.

Studies on effects of personal influencers

Personal influencers, or rather their potential effects on young adults' career choices, have been researched extensively over the years. This discussion outlines some of the findings from earlier studies. One of the important findings is that the careers that young adults pursue and those of their parents are often similar. This has been found for example by Atkinson (Atkinson, 2017), who has been examining the connection between socioeconomic factors and the young adults' outcomes in various areas of life. Studies utilising especially the structuralist approach, further discussed in the next part, have suggested that the social connections and cultural knowledge that parents convey to their children allows for the reproduction of educational trajectories (Ball, 2002). This is especially found in systems where the pathing to different pathways occurs at a relatively early stage, which was the case in the study by Seghers and colleagues (Seghers et al., 2019). The earlier pathing appears to result in the parents having to navigate the educational structures, which is where specific knowledge and connections can be helpful (Seghers et al., 2019). Earlier studies have also found that in these tracking systems – which are common in Europe – that pupils from working-class backgrounds are less likely to choose the academic tracks than their peers from middle-class backgrounds (Boone and Van Houtte, 2013; Seghers et al., 2019).

As will be discussed in Chapter 3, in the Scottish system pupils make their pathway and career choices relatively late in school. This tends to occur between ages 15 to 17 depending on whether the pupils leave school early or not (Canduela et al., 2010). As such, the parental

influence works somewhat differently in the Scottish context, but parental influence is still important.

Study by Brunila (2011) and colleagues also found that factors related to personal background were found to have an effect on educational choices. These factors inclued gender, social class, ethnicity and sexuality (Brunila et al., 2011). The background factors appeared to interact with the societal norms as they interacted with the dominant discourses present in the society. The discourses and norms are in part expressed through the hierarchy of the educational options available to the young adults and the way young people with specific background factors are normed to be 'fit' for a specific pathway and thus discursively young adults identify more strongly with specific routes.

Brunila and colleagues' findings also point out that the young people are presented with a narrative of personal responsibility and choice in educational decision-making and the key factors for the choices being personal strengths and interests (Brunila et al., 2011). This means, that the discourses and norms that are present and presented to the young people contain messaging that indicates that socioeconomic factors and other structural factors do not affect one's choices or success (Brunila et al., 2011). Instead, the narratives put the decision-maker in a position of control and responsibility. Brunila and colleagues argue, that although the dominant narrative directed to at the young people suggests these background factors do not matter, they do in fact affect certain elements of choices (Brunila et al., 2011). Specifically, one of the ways that the classed and stereotyped discourses influence choices emerge from exposure to narratives of 'correct' careers and pathways for a person of any given background. These narratives can come from different sources, including from personal influencers (Boone and Van Houtte, 2013).

The factors discussed in the study by Brunila and colleagues has implications for examining the influencers' effects. The socioeconomic factors, including social and cultural capitals are in connected to their personal influencers (Boone and Van Houtte, 2013). For example, narratives and attitudes towards university or apprenticeship education can be present at young person's home (Boone and Van Houtte, 2013). Additionally, parents might have information and connections to careers and pathways, which the young adults can utilise.

However, while the familial approval and the influence of parental preferences has been found to be influential in at least some young adults' journeys in past studies, the importance of the parental influence appears to also vary based on background factors. Study by Hegna

and Smette (2017) examining experiences with parental influencers found that while pupils from both majority and minority backgrounds experienced similar levels of support from their parents, the importance of parental approval in choices differed between the two groups. While the two groups appeared to express choice and their agency to the same extent, pupils from minority background appeared to be more sensitive to the opinions of their parents and negative attitudes from them towards the young adults' choices appeared to have greater potential to complicate the process of making a choice and the sense of autonomy.

Similarly, the parental approaches to managing the young adults' transitions from school to further education and work have been found to be connected to parental socioeconomic status as well as the attitudes of the young adults' peers (Ball, 2002; Brooks, 2003; Reay and Ball, 1998). The study by Reay and Ball (1998) found that despite the earlier views from 1960's to 1980's – at the very least in the UK – that the working-class parents were more controlling of their children's educational journeys than middle-class parents, the situation could be the opposite. The middle-class parents were found the be more strategic and controlling of their children's journeys. This could be manifested through suggestions for an appropriate pathways and providing/imposing parameters within which the young people had to make their choices (Boone and Van Houtte, 2013; Reay and Ball, 1998). Conversely, working-class families appeared to be more generally supportive of what the young adults wished to pursue.

Brooks' (Brooks, 2003) examination of young adults' HE choices suggested that the families had a strong influence of young adults' ideas about the HE pathway, but friends and other peers played an important role in informing the young adults on which options available to them were feasible. Thus, these personal influencer groups together were found to inform the young adults about the HE as an option as well as the feasibility of different HE institution options for the young adults to choose from.

Studies of effects of Institutional influencers

The studies on important influencers are not limited to the parents and other personal influencers that the young adults have connections to through their family and personal social networks. The importance of teachers, career advisors and other institutional actors in influencing the educational journeys of young adults has also been examined in past studies. A study by Polesel and colleagues (Polesel et al., 2018) investigated the expectations of parents and teachers in schools regarding young adults' performance and found that the teachers tended to have lower expectations of pupils than either the young adults themselves

or their parents. This is arguably creating an environment where the discourses and social cues present in the school field exert a downward pressure for students' aspirations and sense of what they would be capable of pursuing after school (Polesel et al., 2018). However, the effect does not appear to be determinant. For example Myklebust's (2019) research showed that the young adults do not just follow the 'suitable' paths and careers for them in discourses, but instead they also demonstrate resistance to the discourses. The Myklebust's research was especially focused on gendered discourses of different fields, and how the young adults exerted their agential preferences that went counter to the default choices in the narratives that they were exposed to in the different fields.

One of the key roles of institutional influencers is providing information about career pathways, including vocational pathways. This has been examined my Kamm and colleagues (Kamm et al., 2020). The career guidance provided in educational institutions – examining he lower secondary stage in the Swiss system in the study – was found to be important for developing the young adults' vocational orientation and providing direction in their educational decision-making. The importance of personalised guidance in this process that accounted for personal preferences and enabled the young adults to consider the requirements, challenges, and how to address them was important (Kamm et al., 2020). Thus, the institutional actors provide support in these areas especially for those that need extra support and sought to do a bridge-year course in the Swiss system. This support can be an enablement that supports young adults' aspiration formation as well as the execution.

The importance of career guidance and support in educational institutions has also been examined by D'Angelo and Dollinger (2021). They examined the role of those actors in achieving positive outcomes among rural, remote, and regional learners in Australia. The findings suggested that earlier careers education could better prepare the young adults for making choices about their post-school options. The involvement of local employers and their visibility in schooling was highlighted as an important factor among institutional actors, as the young adults were aware of some of the largest employers in areas but generally their familiarity with opportunities was lacking. Thus, the institutional support is again emphasised as especially important among communities and learners who do not necessarily have the connections and resources to employers in large population centres where the opportunities are more abundant. This suggests that a common, widely available support and network of connections can help balance some of the disadvantages in social resources that young people might face as a barrier.

The institutional influencers are not limited to the school context. Henriksen and colleagues (Henriksen et al., 2015) examined the role of out of school experiences and resources for encouraging young people to careers in STEM. The HE institutions as sites were rated as more inspirational than other locations and resources, including campaign websites from authorities' organisations that sought to boost interest in STEM careers. Commercials, company visits, and school counsellors likewise received low ratings as sources for inspiration in the study. Inspiration in this instance appeared to be operationalised as something that encourages the young adults to seek training and education in the field and indicates that different actors from outside the school environment can strongly influence interest towards a field or training. The actors providing the inspiration varied in effect based on the location.

However, the study did not appear to examine the form of the information provided by the different actors. The effects of the type of information and the source of information on educational choices has been examined in other earlier studies. What they have found is that 1st or 2nd hand information from people in person's social networks ('hot' information) or similar information from people that the decision-maker can relate to ('warm information) appears to be highly trusted and influential in decision-making (Ball and Vincent, 1998; Hutchings, 2005; Slack et al., 2014). Information from official sources – such as university sites in case of university choices – were less trusted and less influential, at least on their own (Slack et al., 2014).

These information sources were not universally across people from all backgrounds. This is at least in part due to access to the resources. Whereas those people with social connections to universities ('embedded') had sources that could provide 'hot' information, those from outside positions had to rely more on official sources like websites and guides (Ball et al., 2002). However, this finding is in some ways challenged by findings from Hutchins' study, where people from working-class background were found to utilise 'Warm' information more than their middle-class counterparts (Hutchings, 2005). However, this was in part because the middle-class background young people had some trusted 'hot' sources that could help in the interpretation of the 'cold' information. This all highlights the interconnectedness of the issue of influencers and the types of information that is influential and trusted by young adults in their decision-making.

This issue has also been examined in studies by Granovetter (1983, 1973) and in his theory of "the strength of weak ties". The theory suggests that it is weak ties that are especially

influential. Weak ties are those that a person has not with their closest friends and family but with people they know as casual friends and acquaintances. These weak ties indicate a smaller overlap in the social circles between individuals, and in turn a greater opportunity for diffusion of new information and influence from one social circle to another (Granovetter, 1973). While Granovetter's approach is influential and well known in research into the issues that this study examines, this study predominantly utilises the 'hot', 'warm' and 'cold' information concepts as they were found to be more easily fitted into the study's research framework (discussed in Section 4.3).

Institutional influencers, especially teachers, also have been found to have a role in forming a 'sense of limits' in young people. This means outlining which options are pragmatic and rational options to pursue among the different young adults (Delay, 2022). This role appeared to be important in the relatively rigid Swiss education system (Delay, 2022). The teachers' discourses contributed to the narrowing of the considered options for young adults especially in contexts where they were already tracked to go into vocational and apprenticeship training (Delay, 2022). The discourses resulted in the students adjusting their subjective aspirations to what was presented to them to be the 'objective chances'. These narratives were found to be adding to the narratives and values that were contained in young adults' home environments as well, exerting cultural attitudes such as preference for manual labour through the families (Delay, 2022).

Finally, the potential effect of influencers has been found to reduce over time in some of the earlier studies, such as one by Adshead and Jamieson (2008). In their study, younger people (who in the study were around age 30) were found to be more influenced by others and older participants (up to 81 years old) were found to be more autonomous and working more on the basis of utilitarian rationality. However, while there were changes in overall pattern of decision-making in this way, the sample also contained variability (Adshead and Jamieson, 2008). Similar findings have also been made in Archer's work on different forms of reflexive decision-making (Archer, 2012, 2007), which is discussed in the next Part of this Chapter.

All the studies discussed above have contributed to the understanding of which actors contribute to the decision-making process and the establishment of aspirations and plans that are enacted by the young adults in schools. This study seeks to add to the understanding of the role of influencers in young adults' decision-making by examining the moments in which the different influencers are important, and the ways they support and/or restrict the young adults' agency in educational decision-making. Thus, the study seeks to add to the existing

knowledge regarding the contexts in which the influencers are affecting the young adults' choices as well as how influencers' practices in these contexts provide stronger or weaker influence.

2.4. Review of three theories of decision-making

The last part of this review focuses on reviewing three theories of decision-making, which have all been used in examination of educational decision-making. These theories posit reasons for why young adults make certain choices and how decision-making is affected by structural and agential factors (Archer, 2003; Atkinson, 2010a, 2017; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Bourdieu, 1977).

The relative importance of societal structures and personal agency is one of the key areas for debate in various areas of social science research. This review focuses on how the factors are present in educational and career choices that people make over the course of their lives, and what different theoretical approaches say about their roles in decision-making (Atkinson, 2010a; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Evans, 2007; Hatcher, 1998).

Sometimes the effects of the two factors are represented as a binary choice between the two factors as research traditions focusing on the importance of one side emerged. In that vein, different schools of thinking have emerged to explain social action and people's decision-making emphasising the importance of either rational agential decision-making or the structural factors contained in the environments that the decision-makers occupy (Archer 2007; 2012). However, as will be seen through the discussion, both factors are important in decision-making and the theories have evolved over time as a result.

2.4.1 The rational choice approaches to educational decision-making and theories of individualisation

The Rational Choice Theories (RCTs; or Rational Action Theory as called by Goldthorpe 1998) and Human Capital Theories (HCTs) have been influential in both theoretical framings of young adults' transitions and in VET research (Pantea, 2020). There are different forms of RCTs, but the common core among them is the assumption of agential power of the decision-makers over structural constraints – to varying degrees in some versions of the theories (Goldthorpe, 1998). Goldthorpe has outlined the variability among RCTs on three axes: 1) on the 'strength' of rationality requirements; 2) situational versus procedural rationality and; 3)

the claims to generality or specificity of the applicability of the theory of action in different situations (Goldthorpe, 1998).

The fundamental approach to thinking about decision-making in RCT views is that people are considered to be "rational optimisers" who through cost-benefit analyses seek to maximise the utility that they expect – and the expectation is subjectively defined (Olssen and Peters, 2005). The versions of RCT that are focused on the actors posit that the explanations of social phenomena rest in the individuals' actions and are thus based on the principles of individualism. The narrow or specific versions of RCT, educational and career choices (and aspirations for careers) are explained via potential economic benefits that the investments into education could bring. The choices are made in relation to other alternative labour market paths. The narrow view of RCT is thus in line with the Human Capital (HC) approach which also presents educational choices as investments made in the present time for future returns (Becker, 1994). These investments are into human capital – discussed earlier in Section 2.2.3. – and take forms of skills, knowledge, and competencies. Human capital is gained primarily through education and are expected to provide benefits for both the individual gathering the human capital as well as for the society as a whole (European Commission, 2021; OECD, 2001; Wallenborn, 2010).

In addition to providing an explanation for why people make certain choices, the RCT seeks to explain stratification of educational outcomes, educational choices, social mobility and inequalities by distinguishing between 'primary effects' and 'secondary effects' of social class (Boone and Van Houtte, 2013; Breen and Goldthorpe, 1997). The approach was pioneered by Boudon (1974). In this approach the primary effects refer to socioeconomic background and cultural identity (and their effects on students' school performance), whereas the secondary effects refer to different choices made by young people's parents at key educational decision-making points (Boone and Van Houtte, 2013). This was further built on by Breen and Goldthorpe, who emphasised the secondary effects (Breen and Goldthorpe, 1997; Goldthorpe, 1998). The primary effects are what the structuralist accounts are more interested, as will be outlined in the next section, but in the RCT approach they are seen as less influential effects to the secondary effects. Indeed, Boudon suggests that once the primary effects are controlled for, the class differences in educational outcomes are still high (Boudon, 1996, 1974). The secondary effects are seen to emerge from rational cost and benefit evaluations which young people's parents – or indeed young people themselves later on – make about educational choices (Boone and Van Houtte, 2013). The contextual

assessment is based on the school achievements, personal ability, the resulting perceived probability of success, and finally the potential rate of return from the options.

Breen and Goldthorpe's (1997) approach also set out certain assumptions of for the decisions that result in the secondary effects. One of the important assumptions in this rational assessment process is that the individuals (or their parents) prioritise the avoidance of social downgrading rather than maximising the chances of social mobility (Boone and Van Houtte, 2013; Breen and Goldthorpe, 1997). As people have different abilities (for example measured through grades in schools), the evaluation of the likelihood of success varies between individuals (Breen and Goldthorpe, 1997). The costs of the different educational options also vary, with the options leading to potentially more gains costing more. From this Breen and Goldthorpe posit that failure in pursuit of a highly valued option results in a higher probability of downward social mobility than opting for the less valued option in the eyes of the decision-makers. As such, unless the estimation of success due to cues suggesting high ability are clear, the 'less valued' option is chosen to prevent downward social mobility (Breen and Goldthorpe, 1997). As such, in liberal skills systems for example, young people could opt for less valued VET option in order to prevent downward social mobility instead of pursuing a relatively costly and risky HE option.

Over time the RCT approach has been criticised by being overly reliant on instrumental rationality and ignoring the subjective interpretations that people use in their decision-making about their contexts and their options (Hodgson, 2012). As a response to these weaknesses, approaches like 'bounded rationality' have been put forward (Simon, 1997).

In the bounded rationality approach, the rationality considered in the decision-making is subjective. As such, people's choices and behaviours can be based on personally defined 'good reasons' that are not related to utility maximisation (Simon, 1997). As a result, the bounded rationality approach takes into consideration the external circumstances in the moment of decision-making. This introduces interactivity between objective barriers and subjective dispositions and interpretations of the decision-makers, which better reflects the way decision-making contexts differ across social groups (Ben-Porath, 2009; Bonal and Zancajo, 2018).

Boudon also adopted a similar approach in his later works (Boudon, 2003). Boudon's later cognitivist model sought to address the limitations of the orthodox RCT, especially seeking to explain behaviours and choices that would be regarded as irrational under the old RCT

approach (Boudon, 2003). In the cognitivist model the choices needed to be meaningful to the individual, and the behaviours resulting from the motives and choices need to be 'strong reasons' that are rational in the personal context (Boudon, 2003).

The empirical evidence of the applicability of the RCT in young adults' educational choices in post-school transitions remains limited and has been controversial in some ways (Jüttler et al., 2016). However, some studies have provided support for the approach. These studies have sought to model decision-making when different pathway options are available alongside Higher Education options, and have found that risk aversion appears to explain educational choices (Hillmert and Jacob, 2003; Holm and Jæger, 2008). For example. findings from study by Hegna (2014) indicate that the primary and secondary effects are more important in different phases of the decision-making. While the primary effects were key in understanding young adults' aspirations for choosing their upper secondary education option to pursue, the secondary effects emerged as more important in the post-secondary education phase. As such the individual cost-benefit assessment became more important in the post-compulsory education choices and as the journeys progress further.

Glauser and Becker (2016) examined the role of opportunity structures on the aspirations and goals held by the young adults after upper-secondary school in Switzerland. One of factors affecting how the different options were evaluated in cost-benefit assessments was the earlier pathway choice in the lower secondary education stage. Those who chose TVET at that stage were found more likely to choose TVET options also after compulsory education. Another key finding is the effect of the opportunity structures in the assessment. This included the range of educational pathways and labour market opportunities available to the young adult. When the opportunities were available, and the labour market contained opportunities, the academic pathways were more likely choices. However, when the options in the post-school and labour market opportunities were seen as more limited, the TVET option was a more likely choice. This suggests a calculation or estimation of the opportunities that is perceived to be available to the young adult and the importance of the economic assessment of the options in decision-making (Glauser and Becker, 2016).

Malin and Jacob (2019) similarly found the opportunities structures to be important in the decision-making. They found that young adults adjusted their post-school career aspirations according to the perceived opportunities in the labour market. Another important element in the study was the gender segregation in the TVET choices, which affected the calculations of career opportunities and expected career success. The perceived opportunities were in the

fields that matched the gendered stereotypes of the fields, thus reproducing the existing inequalities and gender biases in the different fields of work.

Critiques of the Rational Choice Approaches

While there are studies that have supported the approach, those studies have also operationalised the variables differently and as such, comparing the results is difficult (Boone and Van Houtte, 2013).

The RCT, while highlighting the significance of rational decision-making, has some weaknesses that have been critiqued by different authors in the past. One key critique aimed at the RCT approaches is the focus on utility as a driver in decision-making, which began to be addressed by the later approaches to RCT as discussed above. The earlier focus on instrumental variables not only resulted in many motivations not being considered in decision-making. As a response, authors have emphasised that personal desires and values are keys to understanding what people aspire to be, and what drives their educational choices (Kroneberg and Kalter, 2012). The assumption in RCT approaches has often been that the people making decisions have 'realistic' aims and aspirations that they pursue for instrumental gain, as opposed to more idealistic aims consisting of personally intrinsically valued aims (Glauser and Becker, 2016; Hegna, 2014; Malin and Jacob, 2019). This emphasis risks ignoring the intrinsic motivations and aspirations that have been found to contribute to educational choices in other studies (Aldinucci et al., 2021) and oversimplifying the decision-making in social actions (Devine 1998; Hatcher 1998). As such, the RCT has been criticised for not accounting for how personal preferences and values contribute to decision-making (Glaesser and Cooper, 2014; Hatcher, 1998; Powell and McGrath, 2019).

The weaknesses of the RCT approach stem partially from the methodological limitations of large-scale studies utilising quantitative data, which is the predominant approach in the RCT studies (Boone and Van Houtte, 2013). There are studies, like one conducted by Glaesser and Cooper (2014) which utilise utilising more qualitative approaches to examine how young people utilised instrumental motivations and considerations in their decision-making. These have found that while the young people do consider the effects of potential failures and costs of options against their benefits, the rationality of the choice is still limited (Glaesser and Cooper, 2014).

2.4.2 Bourdesian approach to young adults' educational choices

As a response to the positivist and rational choice theories of decision-making the much of the research into young adults' educational choices and trajectories has focused on how different structural or socioeconomic factors affect those choices. Research that has examined the reproduction of inequalities in educational decision-making has often drawn from the structural approaches, including the Bourdesian structural constructivism (Dejaeghere et al., 2016; Polesel et al., 2018; Reay, 2004).

While there are other theories which examine how structural contexts affect decision-makers, this section focuses on the work of Pierre Bourdieu as work has been influential in this area of research (Bourdieu, 1977; Grenfell, 2012). The key elements of his work include the theory of social reproduction and the concepts of *field, habitus, and capitals*. The three concepts form an analytical toolkit that has been used widely in studies to examine issues such as young adults' decision-making, educational inequality, and social mobility (Atkinson, 2010a; Reay, 1998, 2001). The concepts of habitus, fields, and the three forms of capital conceptualized by Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1977; Grenfell, 2012) form a common foundation for the more structuralist research approaches in sociological research.

Field (or fields of practice) is the term used to refer to structural contexts that people occupy (Bourdieu, 1977; Grenfell, 2012; Reay, 2004), and is probably one of the most used concepts from the Bourdesian toolkit. People do not occupy just one field, but move through different fields over their lives. For example, a person would likely move from a field of family – which they would have occupied from their birth until they leave the field – to field of education and work as their life journeys continue. One can also occupy different fields at the same time, such as family and education, which encompass the family environment and school. The fields that the person occupies influences which practices – which are contained in the fields – the person is likely to reproduce (Bourdieu, 1977; Grenfell, 2012). The access to the fields is based on the *capitals* that they embody or have through their social connections, and the accessible capitals are also dependent on the fields that a person can access (Akram, 2013; Bourdieu, 1977; Grenfell, 2012).

Habitus is one of the most recognisable concepts of Bourdieu, but also potentially the most misunderstood and misused (Grenfell, 2012; Reay, 2004). It is conceptualised as embodiment of social structures and cultural forms present in a society, which each individual embodies and which shape dispositions, values, behaviours, and thinking (James, 2015; Reay, 2004). The social structures and cultural forms in the contexts that the person habits shape person's dispositions, values, tastes, and even determine routine thinking, behaviours, and actions

(Bourdieu, 1977). The habitus, and the components that form it, are acquired from fields, which contains of family, friends, other actors in the social environment, as well as different information and discourses. Within the habitus people are thought to internalise practices, attitudes, and habitual approaches from their social environment, ranging from the way people speak, how they feel about things, and what their disposition is towards other people and structures in a society (Bourdieu, 1977; Reay, 2004, 1998). These attitudes are theorised to reflect the way a person is socialised and reflects a person's social position (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Reay, 2004, 1998) A key feature of the habitus is, as the name for the concept implies, that it is in some way habitual. Bourdieu usage of *habitus* contains pre-reflexive, unconscious elements of social actions that people act out in social world (Atkinson, 2007, 2010a; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Grenfell, 2012; James, 2015).

Bourdesian *Capitals* are an important form of resource, which is used to access different fields and which contribute to the reproduction of social inequalities(Dejaeghere et al., 2016; James, 2015). These capital are economic, cultural, and social capitals (Grenfell, 2012). The economic capital refers to economic resources that a person has that they can use. This does not mean only money, but also assets such as properties and possessions. Economic capital is conceptualised to contribute to the degree to which other capitals are possessed by individuals as well. However, some roles (such as different professions) provide varying levels of each capital to an individual. As such, high levels of economic capital does not necessarily equal possession of equivalent cultural or social capital (Atkinson, 2017). Cultural capital consists of dispositions and behaviours that an individual possesses, such as cultural knowledge, practices, accent, credentials, position as a cultural expert or a gatekeeper, and tastes and values (Atkinson, 2017). Finally, social capital refers to the social connections and social networks that an individual belongs to and which they can use to get opportunities and support in different fields (Akram, 2013; Grenfell, 2012).

The capitals that the person has are not static, but can expand and even transform through experiences in life, which includes fields of education and work (Atkinson, 2021; Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997; Mills, 2008). The capitals that the people have are not necessarily valued equally across society, which is most clearly evident in cultural capital (Atkinson, 2017). The dominant group of people has the most 'valued' cultural capital, and their cultural practices and knowledge are often prioritised for example in the navigation of an education system. Conversely, cultural capital held by the 'dominated' groups, such as working-class people, have to negotiate their own cultural identities, demands and aspirations in the environment

where they are not necessarily considered to be ‘legitimate’ or ‘correct’ (Atkinson, 2017; Seghers et al., 2019).

The fields are the sites for power and conflict and places where the reproduction of resources and habitus occur. The conflict in these fields occurs when people from different backgrounds, with different resources and *doxa* come together. Doxa is a concept that refers to the shared values, understanding, knowledge, norms and “what goes without saying” (Bourdieu 1977, p. 164) in a field. The doxa can also be expressed as the dominant discourses, and the conflicts and misrecognition occur when the dominant discourse is imposed upon all as a universal (James, 2015; Threadgold, 2018).

One extensive study using the Bourdesian approach examined how class background impacts various areas of life was conducted Atkinson (2017). He examined for example how educational choices, media consumption, and other factors are being influenced by individuals’ social background. In the study class was considered to be a multidimensional concept utilising Bourdieu’s concepts of field, habitus, and capitals (Atkinson, 2017; Grenfell, 2012).. People in various professions were then mapped out to a matrix by Atkinson where the two axes were economic capital and cultural capital. Different professions were clustered at different locations on the matrix, creating a ‘class on paper’ as Bourdieu termed it (Atkinson, 2017).

The findings from Atkinson’s study showed the complexity of structural effects on decision-making. While it was found that in educational decision-making the choices of people across social classes seemed to be less divided by class status than years prior – expansion of the higher education being the result – the outcome was more influenced by class than what was initially apparent. One example of the class effects was found within the HE sector, which had stratified to greater extent than before(Atkinson, 2007, 2010a, 2017). Those from higher socioeconomic class backgrounds had resources, both cultural and economic, which enabled them to go to the most prestigious institutions at the same rate as before the expansion of HE among the population. For example, those enrolling into the prestigious Russell Group universities are still predominantly coming from more affluent backgrounds than those that go into newer universities (Atkinson, 2010a). This can be influenced by several factors, but one of the possible reasons involves the knowledge, or cultural capital, that one’s parents have. Parents from backgrounds that are not familiar with the academic environment, or do not have contacts with the relevant knowledge, would not know to recommend such universities to their children, and would not have connections that could provide the first-

hand information (Atkinson, 2017; Slack et al., 2014; Smith, 2009a). As a consequence, the HE sector itself has become stratified along very similar lines as the whole UK education sector was divided before.

In all of the cases class effects were mediated through economic, cultural, and social capitals. The differences in capitals, and the resulting differences in outlooks, are influencing the choices and attitudes even if the experienced environments in schools for example are getting more similar, as Beck (Beck et al., 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) suggested. For example, even if two people went to same or very similar school, their home environments still appear to have an effect to attitudes. In the Atkinson study this manifested as a difference in attitudes towards academic learning, fostered over the years at home through means such as encouragement to read (2017). Another way home environment can influence the educational choices is the knowledge that the parents possess. Studies suggest that if the parents have a specific idea about what kind of education provides the best outcome, or what the worth of education is more generally, that affects what kinds of careers they encourage the child to pursue and how enthusiastically they do that (Atkinson, 2017).

Critiques of the structuralist approach

Structuralist accounts have contributed significantly to the understanding of social reproduction and how structural effects can affect young adults' educational choices through routine and unconscious and unintended means. However, the approach has received various critiques. One of the common critiques is the lack of, or limited scope of, personal agency and reflexive action in the structuralist accounts of educational decision-making.

The lack of recognition of the agential decision-making is an issue in two ways. First, in the structuralist accounts the concept of conflict in fields due to mismatch between a person's habitus and the doxa understandings arguably requires reflexive thinking for conflict to occur in the first place (Archer 2012). Similarly, Archer has argued that feeling of unease that results from personal practices and values not being compatible with the contextual environment requires reflection of both the personal values and the environment's values (or attitudes or other components of habitus and doxa). Thus, the lack of reflexive thinking in the structuralist accounts suggests that people's choices are not only affected by the structural factors, but indeed are determined by them (Archer 2003, 2007).

2.4.3 The Critical Realist approach and the role of reflexivity in decision-making

The Critical Realist (CR) approach formulated by Archer (1995, 2003, 2007, 2012) is an approach which seeks to balance some of the key strengths of RCT approaches and structuralist approaches (Baker, 2019). The studies utilising CR sometimes also utilise the toolbox of concepts introduced by Bourdieu, such as capitals and fields. However, the approach differs substantially in how it posits the decision-making occurs. The CR approach emphasises reflexive decision-making and agency of people amidst structural constraints and does not involve a construct like habitus in the decision-making (Archer, 2012). Archer argues that the structuralist issues, such as those by Giddens (Giddens, 1979) and Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1977) conflate agency and structure through the concepts of 'duality of structure' and 'habitus' respectively (Archer, 2010). Instead, Archer proposes an analytical dualism where the structure and culture are separate from agential interaction with them, which in turn allows examination and understanding of the components present in the interactions (Archer, 2010). The interaction between the person (subject) and the structures (object) is thus accomplished through reflexive deliberation, which occurs through (mostly) internal conversations (Archer, 2012, 2003).

Another key concept in the CR approach is morphogenesis (as well as the related but opposite morphostasis), which means an emergence of changes or reproduction of structures from the interaction of actors' agential choices made in the structural contexts (Archer, 2012, 2010). This is the way the approach seeks to explain changes to structures and the cultures. Notably, these structures have to always exist prior to agential action taken by actors, but the actors' actions may alter those structures (Archer, 2010; Baker, 2019).

Reflexive decision-making at the core of the CR approach is posited to exist even in the most embedded and learned practices that we as humans do as daily routines. Archer (Archer 2007, p. 27-28) explains this well using the example of driving a car and encountering an unusual driving situation. Most of the actions occur naturally and without conscious choices – a habitual performance of driving – but those habits need to be codified and learned over time and are not applicable to moments where the structure in which the habits were formed is not present. In a situation where a car feels to be on edge, the driver needs to choose a course of action instead of being on 'auto-pilot'. Thus, even the most routine actions involve moments when discursive reflexive decision making of "what is wrong?" and "Should I slow down,

stop, carry on and see if the problem persists?" occurs. Archer argues that this is true even when there is a 'script' to follow that has not been practiced, as it takes more conscious effort to follow the procedures rather than just instinctively react by for example slamming the breaks the moment car control is lost or at the edge of loss. This leaves a role for habitual action, but the role is limited compared to the Bourdesian approach, and in some writings of Archer the role of habitual action is severely diminished (Decoteau, 2016).

Educational journeys of young adults, as discussed earlier, are long and potentially very complex. As such, there are important decisions that they need to make as part of their learning journeys. Archer critiques the Bourdieusian approach, especially the concept of habitus, as incompatible with the morphogenetic process (Archer, 2012, 2007). She argues that young adults today are not able to rely on habitual guidelines and scripts that Bourdieu posits as part of the habitus and its role in informing actions (Archer, 2007). The habitus would require contextual continuities where the habitual guidelines could guide the individual through the structures, but Archer argues that the society today has moved from 'contextual continuities' to a state of 'contextual discontinuities' (Archer, 2012). These discontinuities have emerged from structural changed that have emerged unevenly in different contexts that results in unpredictable social contexts. This evaluation of the state of educational transitions today is found in other studies, as outlined in Section 2.2.1 (Heinz, 2009; Wyn, 2014). Thus, instead of being surrounded by stable structures that can be navigated through habituation which young adults learned in their community the changing structure have formed a 'situational logic of opportunity' (Archer 2012, p.41). In this situational logic of opportunity there are no clear routes and pathways for the individuals to pursue. As a result, Archer suggests that reflexive deliberation of options is something that has become almost inescapable if the subject seeks to pursue a course of action, such a transition to a career, successfully (Archer, 2012).

The decision-making model forming the core of the CR model is the three-stage model (Archer 2007; shown in figure 2.1). The three-stage model outlines the way in which the agential decision-making interacts with the structural factors. The structural and cultural properties always objective shape the context and circumstances that the agents (decision-makers) must negotiate. The agents are not voluntarily choosing the contexts. In a similarity to structuralist approaches, these structural factors possess the powers to generate (and potentially reproduce) both constraints and enablements for people's decision-making.

FIGURE 2.1 : THE THREE-STAGE MODEL (ADAPTED FROM ARCHER, 2007, P.17. EMPHASIS FROM THE ORIGINAL SOURCE)

The Three-Stage Model

1. Structural and cultural properties *objectively* shape the situations that agents confront involuntarily, and *inter alia* possess generative powers of constraint and enablement in relation to
2. Subjects' own constellations of concerns, as *subjectively* defined in relation to the three orders of natural reality: nature, practice, and the social.
3. Courses of action are produced through *reflexive deliberations* of subjects who *subjectively* determine their practical projects in relation to their *objective* circumstances.

The second element in the decision-making refers to the people's subjective experiences of concerns. They are related to natural reality, practice, and social elements of reality. The third step describes the idea that people make their choices through reflexive deliberations and subjectively determine their practical projects and actions in relation to the objective circumstances that they occupy. Thus, the aims, goals, and the ways they are achieved, are subjectively defined by the decision-makers and are influenced by their subjective concerns. The reflexive deliberation element differentiates the CR approach from the structuralist approaches. The goal setting and the decision-making approaches are not shaped by the structures via habitus. Instead, decision-making is influenced by the structural factors through enablements and barriers (such as differing amounts of capitals) but ultimately the approaches and goals are decided via reflexive process. As such people navigate these structural restrictions through the different resources and enablements that they have access to. As such, the approach accounts for structural factors in decision-making, as well as subjective definition of personal projects and concerns, while asserting that people ultimately make choices through their agency (Archer, 2012; Baker, 2019)

Modes of Reflexivity

Reflexivity is at the core of the CR approach, and Archer has elaborated on the forms through which the reflexive process takes place. These modes of reflexivity describe how actors respond to structural challenges and enablements, what kinds of personal projects drive

decision-making, as well as how they approach action and social mobility (Archer, 2012, 2007, 2003). In Archer's formulation of the modes of reflexivity are relatively stable and each person has a primary mode of reflexivity (Archer, 2012, 2007, 2003). Archer has suggested four modes of reflexivity. These are Autonomous, Meta-reflexive, Communicative, and Fractured reflexivities.

Autonomous reflexives do not need to have external conversation with others in decision-making (Archer, 2003). Choices made with autonomous reflexivity are done strategically. The agents seek to maximise the (usually instrumental) benefits from their choices, and they try to leverage the enablements available to them as efficiently as possible in order to navigate the constraints that they face (Archer, 2007). Archer associated the autonomous decision-makers with pursuit of upward social mobility and the demonstration of instrumental rationality when pursuing their goals (Archer, 2012).

Meta-reflexive reflexivity was outlined initially by Archer as a mode where the subjects reflect upon their own reflections. Similarly to the autonomous reflexives, the reflexive process is conducted internally and independently among meta-reflexives (Archer, 2012). However, instead of pursuing material gains and utilising instrumental rationality to gain them, meta reflexives have stronger personal values and ideals as primary concerns which they seek to fulfil and address (Archer, 2007). Meta-reflexives do not necessarily seek upward mobility, but neither do they seek to reproduce their natal contexts. As a result, social mobility patterns among this group in Archer's research were unpredictable. This partially stemmed from the participants not necessarily seeking to maximise their potential enablements if it went against their values (Archer, 2007).

Communicative reflexives in Archer's categorisation did not do conduct the reflexive process internally for the most part. Instead, people using communicative reflexivity needed to conduct their reflexivity through conversation with other people. This meant that the internal reflexive process was partially external and decision-making was not done independently (Archer, 2007). Archer associated this form of reflexivity with reproduction of one's natal context, as the choices were made with parents and siblings whom appeared to advocate for at least a similar level of socioeconomic outcomes but did not necessarily encourage to seek higher social mobility (Archer, 2007).

Finally, ***fractured*** reflexivity essentially an absence of reflexive decision-making as the person is unable to have the internal conversations that lead to the actions (Archer, 2012).

When using this modality the decision-maker is more passive and has to reactively make their way through the challenges they face. This can lead into others or circumstances making decisions for them since the objective circumstances are not managed by the subjective preferences and approaches (Archer, 2003).

TABLE 2.1: SUMMARY OF THE MODES OF REFLEXIVITY. SELF-ELABORATION OF ARCHER'S WORK.

Modes of Reflexivity	**Main features of the modes**
Autonomous	Autonomous reflexivity is marked by internal conversations where the reflexive process is carried out completely internally. Those utilising the mode strive for contextual discontinuity and generally strive for upward social mobility.
Meta-reflexive	Meta-reflexivity is often self-oriented and critical form of reflexivity where personal values are assessed and the choices and reasons one has made are reflected on internally. The mode is associated with contextual discontinuity, but not necessarily upward social mobility as the personal values of a person might prevent them from using all the enablements that they can potentially access.
Communicative	Communicative reflexivity is marked by the reflexive process not being completely internal. Instead, the reflexive conversations require validation from significant people (often family members) prior to the person taking actions. Archer associated this mode with contextual continuity.
Fractured	The fractured reflexivity is a result of distressed or frustrated responses where the reflexivity does not lead to any purposeful courses of action. Instead, the agent takes a passive stance where their actions can be reactive and dictated by circumstance. Generally caused by social or environmental barriers.

Archer suggested that the modes are relatively stable and in her empirical work the participants demonstrated only one mode in each account (Archer, 2012, 2007). However, other researchers have found that that dual modes of reflexivity were common (Baker, 2019; Bovill, 2012; Dyke et al., 2012). These studied examined decision-makers' accounts of their decision making and found that the participants had elements from different modes in their reflexive thinking. When analytically allowing participants to use more than one reflexive mode, the analysis permitted a more intricate understanding how agency is used in response to different contexts and when facing different constraints (Baker, 2019).

Baker also argues that this approach allows for identification of structural circumstances that cannot be negotiated with agency alone, instead requiring the use of other people and resources (Baker, 2019). In Baker's research, the participants who demonstrated predominantly autonomous reflexivity in their journeys also showed the utilisation of communicative reflexivity when they faced barriers that they could not overcome through their own agency.

Utilising the reflexive modes in a conceptual framework when examining young adults' choices is argued to allow for accounting for different patterns in decision-making (Case, 2013). When young adults' decision-making is examined through the modes of reflexivity while considering their subjectively defined projects (aspirations) and the structural enablements and constraints they face, the CR approach can avoid structural determinism while accounting for structural factors in career choices (Baker, 2019).

The CR approach has been critiqued much like RCT and structuralist approaches. The key critique from the structuralist approaches is the overemphasis of reflexive decision-making in some versions of the CR approach. Archer's later works have been one target for critiques. One of the elements that the critiques have focused on is the role of habits and habitual decision-making, the critics have said to have been reduced to an overly limited role (Decoteau, 2016; Elder-Vass, 2007)

Decoteau in her critique of the CR has also attempted to address the critiqued overemphasis of agency, or more accurately the downplay of habitual actions, by seeking to combine elements of the structuralist and the CR approaches. Different proposals to do this have been made, but they fundamentally involve re-imagining or re-iterating habitus in a way that allows for scope to include reflexivity into the theory (Decoteau, 2016). This way Decoteau is

one of the latest people attempting to bridge the gap between the Bourdesian structuralist approach and the CR approach.

In this study I will be predominantly utilising CR approach as the basis of the analytical framework. As such, personal reflexivity is a core part of the analysis. However, I will also examine the key moments of reflexivity in the young adults' journeys to see when the reflexive decision-making was most evident.

Reflexivity and individualisation thesis

As discussed in Section 2.2.1., multiple authors have argued that the transitions of young adults have become less structured (Wyn, 2014). Indeed, it has been argued that when the industrial jobs, as well as clear routes to the career 'niches', began to weaken that factors such as social class have become almost meaningless (Atkinson, 2007; Beck et al., 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). This argument about the weakening of old social forces has been put forward by various authors, such as Beck, Bauman, and Giddens (Bauman, 2013; Beck et al., 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Giddens, 1991). Alongside the argument that the old social forces like socioeconomic class have diminished effects due to modern societal structures, these theorists have suggested that individual agency is the driving factor in decision-making in an individualised society (Bauman, 2013; Beck et al., 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Giddens, 1991). The variations of this general notion of changed decision-making environment has been called different things depending on the author putting the idea forward. It has been called 'individualization' by Beck and Bauman (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), a 'liquid modernity' (Bauman, 2013), as well as 'reflexive project' (Giddens, 1991). These theories and their links to reflexivity are briefly outlined in this section since Archer's formulation of CR approach has also been criticised for diminishing the effects of social structures like socioeconomic background and overly emphasising the effects personal reflexivity (Atkinson, 2010b; Decoteau, 2016). Archer's concept of reflexive decision-making has also been connected to individualisation approaches (Archer, 2012).

While the four theorists have put forth ideas that differ in some ways from each other, they share a similar core claim: modernity, and the forces associated with it, have eroded the societal structures like class and now individuals need to make choices and design their own identities through their choices (Atkinson, 2007; Bauman, 2013; Beck et al., 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Giddens, 1991).

Importantly, for example Beck's approach posits that the diminishment of old structures imposes a need for individuals to think reflexively about their choices (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). The most powerful driver of the diminishment of formerly powerful social forces is claimed to be the expanded education system (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Education systems, Beck claims, have replaced traditional lifestyles with more 'universalised' forms of knowledge and language. In addition to education systems bringing people closer together in what they know and what language they use, the success in the system is based on individual achievement and is awarded with credentials which are again bound to the individual (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).

The theories of individualization and reflexivity are argued to be supported by many of the trends of the 21st century, especially those that are often considered to be a result of neo-liberal thinking (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). The argued trends include the expectation of being mobile and willing to move after jobs, as well as personal responsibility for education and other life choices (Atkinson, 2010a). The increased fluidity of the class structures is often suggested to be evidenced by different factors. First is the increasing numbers of people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds going into higher education and another example is the reduced correlation with entertainment and media preferences and class (Atkinson, 2007). These trends are evident in research. Higher education has become more open to people from lower socioeconomic classes over time and various forms of entertainment are consumed by people across socioeconomic classes (Atkinson, 2017).

Despite the trends giving some credence to the theory, it has been challenged by several authors. These authors include Atkinson (2007, 2010, 2017), Furlong (Furlong, 2009; Furlong et al., 2011), and Wyn (Furlong et al., 2011; Wyn, 2014; Wyn and White, 2015) among others. These authors, and others besides them, are challenging the conclusions of reflexivity theorists about the diminishing effects of social structures, most notably socioeconomic class. The principal arguments against the individualisation thesis do not argue against individuals being made responsible of their transitions into work and having to make multiple choices in complex transitions. As discussed earlier, those elements have seemingly increased over time (Wyn, 2014; Wyn and White, 2015). The argument of those criticising the reflexivity theories is broadly that these reflexivity demands, and individual choices are still being influenced by different structural effects, which the reflexivity thesis appears to overly diminish (Atkinson, 2010c, 2010b)

The CR approach, while arguing that the structures that created clear pathways for people from different social origins are weakened, does not argue that the structures are not affecting young adults any longer. Thus, the critiques that the CR approach is not accounting for the structural barriers is not accurate, as it does include them in the three stage model, as discussed above (Archer, 2012, 2007). Indeed, while arguing that people make choices through explicit, conscious, reflexive decision-making, the CR approach does not claim that structural factors do not pose different barriers and enablements that young people need to navigate (Archer, 2012). Additionally, examination of young adults' choices through reflexive modes can even be used to examine how the young adults are able to utilise independent agency to navigate the different challenges connected to socioeconomic classes (such as different resources) as Baker has done in her research (Baker, 2019).

2.5 Summary and the research gap

This review of literature on young adults' educational decision-making has shown that the issue of decision-making has been explored via several different theoretical and methodological approaches. This review has outlined research examining young adults' aspirations, transitions into further education and work, skills systems, role of different influencers, and how these different factors can affect young adults' educational choices.

However, much of the research is focused on understanding young adults' choices to go into academic and higher education, rather than vocational education. As such, this thesis seeks to contribute to understanding why young adults choose to pursue vocational education – specifically apprenticeships – in a liberal skills system such as the UK. Better understanding of the reasons why young adults choose to pursue VET is important in order to: 1) understand what the motivations and contexts of young adults are when they seek apprenticeship training and the field of work choice; and 2) understand the ways that different influencers affect the young adults' subjective preferences and goals, perceptions about available options, and how they enable young adults' pursuit of their aspirations.

This review has shown that while we know that there are several different influencers, there is a need to improve our understanding on which influencers affect young adults' decision-making in different stages of their journeys across different fields habited by the young people. Additionally, understanding how influencers can affect the choices through means such as information provision, support, and advice.

As the focus of the study is understanding how young adults make decisions and how different influencers contribute to that reflexive decision-making process, the CR approach forms the basis of the analytical framework for the study. However, the CR approach is coupled with the conceptual toolkit from the Bourdesian approach to better appreciate the structural factors that pose challenges and provide enablements for the young adults.

The next section outlines the current Scottish skills system, and as such the macro-level structure that shapes the available pathways and support available to young people in their educational contexts.

Chapter 3: Scotland's policy changes from Modern Apprenticeships to Developing the Young Workforce and their effects on the young adults' decision-making environment

This chapter examines the Scottish skills system and provides an overview of the system's development over time. The Chapter begin with an overview of the developments in the UK skills system (section 3.1) with focus on the era after the Modern Apprenticeships (MAs) were introduced in 1995. This was chosen as the starting point for the discussion, as the basis for the current MAs in Scotland was introduced at that time.

The establishment of MAs is followed by an examination of the effects of the Scottish Devolution and the resulting divergence of policy between Scotland and the rest of the UK (Section 3.2). This enabled Scotland to have its own policy regime in (most) matters related to education and young adults' transition (Arnott and Menter, 2007; Keating, 2005; Payne, 2009). As a result, this makes for the most relevant starting point for the examinations of the current policy regime.

The Chapter finishes with an examination of the current policy regime, outlining the Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) strategy as well as the Career Information, Advice and Guidance (CIAG) policies(Education Scotland, 2015c, 2015a; Scottish Government, 2014a). because they frame and govern some of the key structures guiding young adults' transition to work in Scotland. (Sections 3.3 and 3.4).

Sources used in this discussion consist of both research references on policy, as well as policy documents. The sources for research were the same as outlined in Chapter 2. Used keywords included "Modern Apprenticeships", "Apprenticeships", "Scotland", "UK", "Devolution", "Curriculum for Excellence", and "CIAG".The policy documents covered in this section focus especially on the current Scottish policies and strategies governing the transitions. The research references used consist of sources relevant to UK and Scottish policy research.

Historical developments of the policy environment are discussed for two reasons. 1) is to provide context for the policy developments and how the current skills system – and especially the apprenticeships element – has evolved to where it is today – as well as; 2) to provide a sense of the differences in the apprenticeships pathways as experienced by the participants in this study and potentially their parents. The second element is important for understanding the potential attitudes that the examined young adults' parents might have as they grew up with a different apprenticeships system. As discussed in the previous Chapter,

parental attitudes are potentially a great influence in both directing young adults to specific pathways, as well as posing a 'threat' to young adults' agency when disapproval towards specific options is expressed (Brooks, 2003; Hegna and Smette, 2017; Reay and Ball, 1998).

3.1 UK skills system and the introduction of modern apprenticeships to reform the work-based learning pathway

This section outlines the primary structures and features of the UK wide skills system (3.1.1), its apprenticeships component prior to the devolution of powers to the Scottish Government in 1999 (3.1.2), and some challenges that the system has faced which are still relevant today in some ways. The examined period is significant for Scotland today as it formed the basis of the Scottish system which subsequent Scottish Governments (SG) have developed further.

3.1.1 Features of the UK system

The UK skills system is best described as a liberal market economy (LME) using the Varieties of Capitalism (VoC; (Hall and Soskice, 2001b; Hall and Thelen, 2009) typology discussed in Chapter 2. Since the 1980s the UK education system has emphasised higher education as a route to labour market as it has been seen to foster knowledge and transferable skills used in the knowledge economy (Roberts, 2013). In the knowledge economy theorisation growth in productivity is theorised to emerge from the adoption and usage of new technologies, which in turn means that generalisable skills become valuable as they can be utilised in different contexts (Hall and Soskice, 2001b; Hall and Thelen, 2009; Olssen and Peters, 2005). While Vocational Education and Training (VET) is a part of the UK skills system it plays a smaller role than the HE, which has become the default route in the UK (Roberts, 2013).

The emphasis on Higher Education (HE) has arguably left the intermediate skills supply in the hands of the employers for the most part, despite the years of attempts to bolster the supply side of skills in the UK through apprenticeships training reforms (Gospel and Fuller, 1998; Hogarth et al., 2012).

While the apprenticeship route has historically not always been a prominent option for young people, it has been present in some form for a long time. The first national apprenticeship system in England was set up in 1563, but the practice can be traced back to the old craft guilds of the Middle Ages (Mirza-Davies, 2015). However, as Thelen notes, the trajectories of the British and the German skills systems (LME and CME respectively) were partially set

by the government approaches, which in the UK went towards the direction of deregulation in apprenticeships (Thelen, 2004b).

The industries that offered apprenticeships training have grown over the years. While the system originated from the medieval guilds, in 1900s it did broaden to industries such as engineering, shipbuilding, plumbing and electrical work as the system expanded alongside the introduction of new technologies (Mirza-Davies, 2015). More recently, apprenticeships have been used to try to bolster the availability of specific intermediate level skills in the labour market (Hogarth et al., 2012). The relative lack of intermediate skills has been identified as one of the factors that have reduced the UK's productivity compared to other European counterparts (Lloyd and Payne, 2003). This has ensured that the apprenticeships garner periodic attention from the policymakers as they seek to introduce changes to bolster the intermediate skills supply and resolve the issue that is arguably a result of the continued emphasis in HE over VET (Lloyd and Payne, 2003).

As mentioned earlier, the UK has experienced a large expansion of HE-sector over the past few decades. It is at least partially a result of successive government efforts to bolster it as they have chased the knowledge economy benefits (Olssen and Peters, 2005; Payne, 2009). At the start of 1960s one in sixteen people participated in HE, which had changed to one in three attending HE by early 2000s (Blanden and Machin, 2004). In contrast, in 1995 the number of apprentices in work had fallen to less than half from the 1979 levels (Mirza-Davies, 2015).

Successive UK governments led by different political parties, such as the New Labour government (1997-2010), Coalition government (2010-2015), and the Conservative led governments (2015-) have been overseeing these expansions of the higher education system. While the HE attendance has expanded in the UK over time, vocational education has been receiving more sporadic attention in the form of successive reforms that bring the focus on the VET (Unwin, 1996). The sporadic attention to the vocational pathway to work has left it in a difficult spot. This is partially a result of the different reforms seeking to impose different functions to the VET training over time as it has been used to address various social ills (Brockmann and Laurie, 2016a). VET pathways, and apprenticeships in particular, have been used to capture some of those that might not have gone to employment or education through programmes like Youth Training Programmes. This has been done for example by targeting the VET offering for those who would not have been able to go to a university after schooling (Brockmann and Laurie, 2016a). However, this targeting of the VET offering has caused its

own issues, such as the lacking perceived value of apprenticeships in the eyes of many young people (Brockmann and Laurie, 2016a; Unwin and Wellington, 1995). These issues are long-standing, recurring, and the different policy changes have sought to address them with limited success.

The discussion of the UK VET system begins at possibly the largest change in the apprenticeships system in the UK in recent decades, which is the introduction of modern apprenticeships in 1995 and 1996.

3.1.2 Introduction of Modern Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships have gone through several changes and revisions over their history, but possibly the most significant change to the system was the introduction of "modern apprenticeships", which set up the basis for the current Modern Apprenticeship in Scotland.

One of the prominent changes that modern apprenticeships introduced was the extension of apprenticeships to new sectors that did not use apprenticeships in workforce training earlier (Gospel and Fuller, 1998). After modern apprenticeships were introduced in 1995 and 1996, there were already 54 sectors covered by the apprenticeship system, which was a substantial increase from the prior system (Burke, 2016). The breadth of sectors that provide apprenticeships has kept growing since the introduction of the modern apprenticeships. In 1997 more than 70 sectors provided training, and today there are around 230 apprenticeship frameworks in England and 113 in Scotland (Gallacher et al., 2004; Gospel and Fuller, 1998; Notley, 2017; Skills Development Scotland, 2021a, 2022a). While the broadening of the apprenticeship system is notable, there were other changes which altered the nature of the apprenticeships in important ways.

Before the introduction of modern apprenticeships, the work-based learning and training was primarily conducted at the workplace. This meant that costs and risks were divided between the employer and the apprentice (Gospel and Fuller, 1998). The employer would provide the apprentice with approved training over a period of time, and in return the apprentice did productive work for a reduced pay since they were not yet qualified (Gospel and Fuller, 1998). This was meant to be an incentive for both the employer and the apprentice to complete the training. However, once modern apprenticeships were introduced, state took upon itself to subsidise off-the-work training of apprentices. Thus, costs were divided between three parties instead of two (Gospel and Fuller, 1998). The change had implications for oversight and accountability of the apprenticeships as well since the state became one of

the sponsors of the training (Gospel and Fuller, 1998). The training was conducted according to standards that are outlined in the different industry frameworks. The purpose of the frameworks was to define the trained skills before the qualifications could be provided as well as to provide consistency in the training across the sector that the framework covers (Gospel and Fuller, 1998). Thus, the state became more involved in the provision of apprenticeship training, even if it was not to the same extent as in collective and statist systems.

Another big change introduced during the reform was to make the training competency based—meaning that the qualification was dependent on a successful accumulation of demonstrable and relevant knowledge and skills rather than being dependent on certain amount of time spent in training under specified conditions (Gospel and Fuller, 1998). This change allowed apprenticeships to be completed more quickly, which was one of the central goals of the reform (Fuller, 1996; Gospel and Fuller, 1998). This shift also included a change from focusing on the outcomes of the training into paying more attention to the process of the training, something that was a desired effect in the change to the apprenticeships (Fuller, 1996). Both changes were meant to increase flexibility and make the apprenticeships adjustable to new sectors (Maguire, 1998). For young people the programme was offering more choice and the hope was that the changes would rejuvenate the then flagging apprenticeships (Gospel and Fuller, 1998; Maguire, 1998).

Finally, the reform also attempted to make the apprenticeships to provide that important pathway to intermediate skills (Gospel and Fuller, 1998; Maguire, 1998). This manifested as a requirement for the training to be at least Level 3 in the national vocational qualification (NVQ) system, which raised the required level from the earlier standard. Before the introduction of modern apprenticeships, much of the skills training in non-apprenticeship sectors was done through Youth Training (YT) programmes where training was primarily on NVQ level 2 (Gospel and Fuller, 1998; Maguire, 1998). The change was introduced for the most part in order to address the perceived need for intermediate skills that was thought to be due to the transformations happening in the economy (Fuller, 1996). Prior to the introduction of MAs only one fifth of the awarded NVQs were level 3 or above (Gospel and Fuller, 1998). These developments were also reflected in Scotland, and like in England, the change into NVQ level 3 did not last subsequent changes. For example, when a system providing level 2 training called Skillseekers was phased out and its functions were merged into MA structures (Scottish Government, 2003). This again led to the lowering of the average level of training

provided by MAs. As will be discussed later in this Chapter, this was one of the things that the DYW strategy sought to address when it was introduced later.

3.1.3 Key challenges with apprenticeship training in the UK

The success of the different reforms has been debated in the literature ever since the introduction of MAs (Fuller, 1996; Gospel and Fuller, 1998; Hogarth et al., 2012). One of the challenging issues is the prestige of apprenticeships (Brockmann and Laurie, 2016a; Fuller and Macfadyen, 2012).

A study by Ryan & Lőrinc (2018) examined how the discrepancy of prestige between academic and vocational pathways framed young people's apprenticeship experiences and how young people resisted the stigma that was associated with the pathway. The reasons for the existence of this stigma are argued to stem partially from the efforts to broaden the inclusion in HE (Ryan & Lőrinc, 2018). The policies of expansion have not only provided larger parts of the population an access into HE, but they have also resulted in an expectation that HE is the first choice for everyone, rather than broadening all the pathway options for everyone. This has arguably created a situation where a person doing training outside HE is an outlier, or even a failure of some kind (Ryan and Lőrinc, 2018).

The message of HE being the default options appears to have been learned in schools, where university is promoted as the default pathway and apprenticeships have become the option for those that are not performing well enough to enter into university (Brockmann and Laurie, 2016a; Ryan and Lőrinc, 2018). However, while there might be stigma regarding apprenticeships, it does not mean that young people are automatically going to avoid it. Indeed, sometimes young people in the Ryan and Lőrinc's study have indicated going against their parents' wishes by going ahead with apprenticeship rather than HE (Ryan and Lőrinc, 2018). I sought to examine how apprenticeships were presented to young people in Scotland to see if similar dynamics to those in England are present in Scotland as well.

The stigma is negotiated by contrasting the perceived positive aspects of apprenticeships against the negatives of universities. Some of these strategies include framing apprenticeships as 'the adult choice' since it involves productive work. In contrast, universities are framed as places of partying and irresponsibility (Ryan and Lőrinc, 2018). On top of this framing of apprenticeships as the adult option, they are also being presented as the sensible option. Here the young people, or young adults, are utilising the language that politicians and service providers advocating for apprenticeships use (Ryan and Lőrinc, 2018). These arguments

include concerns over employability after university, compared to apprenticeship where you gain tangible work experience—a valuable advantage on the labour market in the eyes of the young people who have kept hearing about its importance.

Another challenge with MAs after their introduction was with the training in MA placements, especially in the newer frameworks in fields not traditionally providing apprenticeship training. Training providers – including private training providers – have suggested that employers do not allow enough time for the apprentices to engage with the training. These providers also argue that employers do not often see the value of training for anything beyond the tasks that their current operation requires (Sims, 2004). Reflecting the Human Capital Theory, this understanding of VET focused on the economically useful skills and outputs instead of considering broader effects of VET to personal well-being and skills for advancing one's personal life projects (Green, 2013; Oliver et al., 2019). This suggests that employers have a utilitarian understanding of the apprenticeships offering, which is not necessarily true for the young adults that seek the MA training as has been shown in studies examining young people's motivations for seeking education (Aldinucci et al., 2021).

Finally, pay has been a challenge with MAs since their introduction. The apprenticeship model has been functioning so that the apprentice absorbs part of the costs of training by working for a smaller pay compared to equivalent full-time work without the training and qualifications component. Sims (2004) found that this dynamic has led to a situation where some apprentices have decided to stop the apprenticeship training and went to another job that paid more but did not result in qualifications. The issues with keeping hold of apprentices are not surprisingly causing employers to be more sceptical about the apprenticeship programmes in the field (Sims, 2004).

The issues with MAs are long-standing and the measures taken by the Scottish government to increase the attractiveness of the apprenticeship option required certain powers that Scotland did not have prior to the Scottish Devolution. The following section outlines some of the changes in powers that were devolved to the Scottish government before we return to Scottish apprenticeships and the Developing the Young Workforce policy.

3.2 Scottish Devolution, policy divergence and continuities

After the introduction of MAs, the next significant development for the Scottish structures governing the school-to-work transitions was Scottish Devolution. 'Scottish Devolution' refers to devolution of powers from the UK government to the Scottish government. This

resulted in the Scottish government having power to set policy on a wider range of issues, including education. Issues covered in this section includes the nature of the devolution, the effects it had on policy governance, and towards the end the discussion returns to the issue of apprenticeships when we begin examining the Developing the Young Workforce strategy.

3.2.1 The devolution of powers and continuities in policy direction

Prior to the devolution of powers in the late 1990s, transitions from school to work in England, Scotland, and Wales were largely similar (Raffe et al., 2001a). In the first few years after the introduction of devolution there was no sudden divergence in Scotland compared to rest of the home nations (the four constituent nations of the UK), and what divergence there was remained small (Payne, 2009). A possible reason for the slow initial divergence is to do with party politics. When devolution was introduced, the Labour party was leading the government both in the UK parliament and in the newly empowered Scottish parliament (Arnott and Menter, 2007; Keating, 2005; Payne, 2009). Therefore, it is understandable that there was not much change in the general policies considering that the Scottish and English labour parties running the governments had, at least for the most part, same policy platforms. However, this situation started to change the Scottish National Party (SNP) gained power in Scotland in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. While education was not highlighted immediately as SNP came to power, the situation changed within few months when the new strategy was published (Payne, 2009; Scottish Government, 2007). The discourse used in the SNP education policy appeared to have a narrative that differentiated the Scottish system from the English one, matching the SNP's drive for Scottish independence from the UK (Arnott and Ozga, 2010).

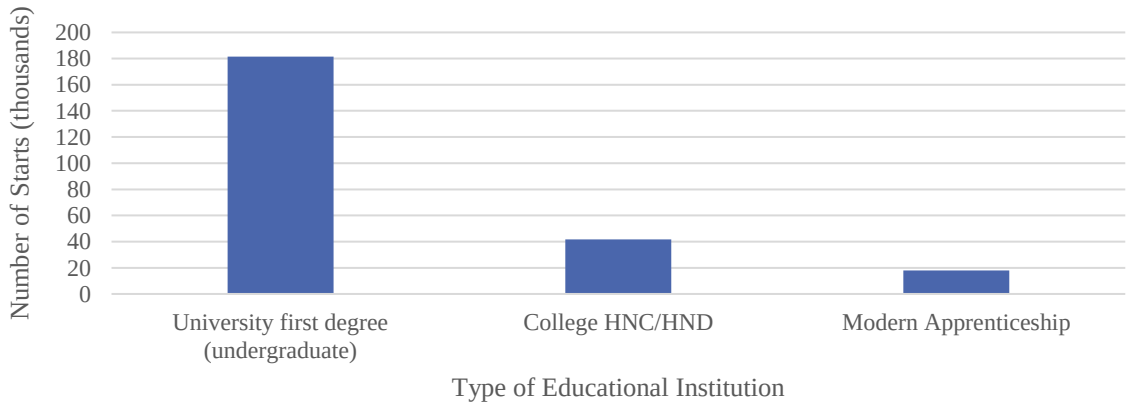
Change was not equally rapid in all areas. As discussed earlier, the UK education has been focused on the academic pathway rather than work-based-learning and the vocational route more generally. The Scottish emphasis on HE does not differ substantially from the rest of the UK. In fact, in some ways the Scottish government provides more incentives to go to higher education compared to England.

The Scottish government investment in HE is evident through the SAAS (Student Awards Agency for Scotland) programme that pays the tuition fees for domestic student under the age of 25. The benefit also extended to students beyond Scotland to students from other EU countries – however not to the rest of the UK – while the UK was part of the EU (SAAS, 2013). This approach of practically making HE education free for domestic students is

arguably making HE a more attractive – and potentially more feasible proposition to more people – in Scotland than in England. The reason for this is funding structure for the education. In England the students are generally responsible for the tuition fees unless they have some third-party funding covering it whereas in Scotland young adults do not need to worry about that aspect of HE education (Donelan, 2021; SAAS, 2022). This is a large investment and demonstrates the importance of HE for the Scottish government. It also demonstrates the continuities even post devolution and shows that the having the power to make changes does not necessarily result in changes to the fundamental approaches.

The emphasis on HE in Scotland can be seen in the student numbers attending universities and HE generally versus other pathway options. In 2020/21 academic year the number of people starting HE studies reached 332,815 and increased by 8.3% from the previous year (Scottish Funding Council, 2022a). Of that total, the number people doing their first degree in a university was 181,495, and those starting and HNC/HND level study in a college reached 41,670 (Scottish Funding Council, 2022a). In comparison, the number of MA starts dropped in 2020/21 due to the Covid pandemic, which hit employers hard and limited the number of MA opportunities, resulting in 18,065 starts (Skills Development Scotland, 2022a). In the 2021/22 academic year the number of people starting MAs recovered to 25,401, but the numbers still lagged behind the 2019/20 peak of 27,875 starts. These differences are summarised in Figure 3.2 below, which shows the prevalence of university as a pathway.

Figure 3.1: Number of people starting University, College, and Modern Apprenticeships in 2020/21 academic year in Scotland[1]



[1] Data in the figure is adapted from Scottish Funding Council (2022b) and Skills Development Scotland (2022c)

Policy divergence, SNP agenda setting, and college reforms set up the scene for further changes in the skills system

The VET side of the skills system showed the strategy differences between Scotland and the rest of the UK more clearly than the HE strategy. The UK VET policies were governed from Westminster until the devolution of powers to the Scottish parliament. The Scottish VET system sought to address some of the issues in skills utilisation after years of emphasis on the supply side of skills in the labour market (Keep, 2017; Payne, 2009). The shift towards paying more attention to the utilisation of skills manifested into attempts to have better coordination between the skills supply side and the demand side, which features prominently in the DYW strategy.

An important part of the VET offering in Scotland is conducted by colleges. The role of colleges in Scotland is complex as they take part in various forms of education and training activity. Colleges provide further education both through general education and vocational education, and they have partnerships with schools that allow for early school-leavers to have a more stable transition into college education (Canduela et al., 2010; McMurray, 2019). However, colleges used to also have wider lifelong learning education tasks, which were scaled back as part of the college reforms in 2013 (McMurray, 2019) The reform regionalised the colleges, meaning various colleges were merged together to create 13 college regions, in order to tailor the college offering for the local needs (Scottish Government, 2013).

The college regionalisation reform was one part of the SNPs skills policy as a new party controlling the Scottish Government (SG). The primary stated aims of SNP in the skills policy were to enhance Scotland's economic growth and productivity while streamlining the college offering, but the funding cuts also had negative consequences especially for adult and part-time learners (McMurray, 2019; Scottish Government, 2013). Productivity had been identified to be an issue UK wide for a long time, but it was even more so an issue to Scotland which had a higher share of people with higher education qualifications than England yet lagged behind in productivity (Payne, 2009). As such, the intermediate skills were identified to be the problem, which is what the SNP skills policies have been aiming to address.

As part of addressing the issues with growth and productivity, the SNP focused on skills leading to qualifications and to work in order to address youth unemployment (McMurray, 2019). This is part of a global trend, and very much European trend, where lifelong learning

has become more instrumental and focused on skills that increase employability (Lowden et al., 2016). While the emphasis on instrumentally valuable skills was not unique to Scotland, the approach chosen to achieve the productivity and growth was one of the points of divergence between Scotland and the UK. Whereas in the UK government and in previous Labour led Scottish government the emphasis was on skills supply, the SNP strategy also emphasised skills utilisation(Payne, 2009). This meant not only providing skills that the employers currently needed but attempting to see what factors drive demand for skills (Scottish Government, 2007).

This strategy remained as part of the language in future versions of the skills policy (Scottish Government, 2010), but the economic crisis of 2008 resulted in SG needing to address the rising unemployment, especially among young people, before it could attempt to tackle the longer-term problem of increasing demand for skills and ensuring their utilisation at a workplace. This was seen in the 2010 policy as it focused primarily on youth employment strategies. Funding was redirected towards getting young people into education and training after they finished with their compulsory education (Valiente et al., 2020b).

Opportunities for All! and *Youth Guarantee* were some of the first policies aimed at young people's transition phase and to ensure their transition to the labour market. These were aimed at addressing the immediate challenge with the young people who did not get into education and training placements, but the SNP led SG had also plans to make some broader structural changes to the education system which eventually manifested into the DYW policy. What follows is an outline of the Scottish Modern Apprenticeship structure prior to the introduction of the DYW as well as the changes that occurred prior to the DYW that prepared the groundwork for it.

3.2.2 The Curriculum for Excellence and groundwork for the DYW policy

The groundwork for the Developing the Young Workforce policy and the changes in young adults' transitions was laid out in the reform of the Scottish curriculum. The Curriculum for Excellence (CFE) was implemented by the SG in 2010 (OECD 2021). The change made the curriculum more modular and flexible than before The extent to which the reform changed how classroom subjects were taught is debatable, even though it was posited as one of the most ambitious educational changes in Scottish history (Priestley and Humes, 2010).

The curriculum affected many elements in the Scottish education system, but the flexibility of Curriculum for Excellence is of special interest to this study as it was used by the SG to

introduce the apprenticeship pathway into Scottish Schools in the DYW in the form of Foundation Apprenticeships (FAs). Utilising the then pre-existing CFE flexibility when planning for the FAs in DYW must have been an attractive one for the SG as it utilised the existing structures rather than changing the institutions drastically, demonstrating the effects of path dependency in policy reforms (Busemeyer and Vossiek, 2016; Keep, 2006). CFE was not the only pre-existing structure that was used in the policy solutions of DYW. Skills Development Scotland, and organisation created in 2008 (Skills Development Scotland, 2022b) to replace the scattered management of apprenticeships was put in charge of the management of new foundation and graduate apprenticeships as well on top of their previously existing responsibilities of examining the skills needs of Scottish economy and the modern apprenticeships management (Scottish Government, 2014a).

The existence of these structures prior to the policy arguably affected the form that the policy has taken, due to the implementation of the policy being less costly when utilising the existing structures. The usage of these pre-existing institutions and structures is consistent with the incremental institutional change which is affected by the path-dependency due to institutional restrictions (Busemeyer & Vossiek, 2016; Streeck & Thelen, 2005). This is an example of how the path-dependency discussed in chapter 2 is manifested in this policy as it works largely with the pre-existing systems rather than creating a new set of institutions that replace the old ones.

The Scottish Government's main long-term strategy to address youth unemployment started with a set of recommendations from a commission set out to investigate the issue(Wood et al., 2014). The response of the SG to the commission report was the Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) strategy (Scottish Government, 2014a). This strategy was aimed directly at the perceived weaknesses of the Scottish vocational education and training (VET) that were outlined in the original commission report. The weaknesses emphasised in the report and the policy were to do with the vocational sector of the training and education system, with special attention paid to the apprenticeship or work-based learning route and issues of equality in the vocational pathway.

The focus on VET in the strategy was not unexpected. The HE-sector in Scotland was doing well and the Scottish government was paying all tuition fees for Scottish and other non-UK EU students, making the universities a popular choice for young people (SAAS, 2022). The VET sector on the other hand had not gained similar attention.

Additional recent addition to the Scottish and the UK VET structures is the UK wide apprenticeship levy. This is a policy that was implemented by the UK government in Westminster, rather than done by the Scottish government. The levy affects UK employers who pay annual salary bills of more than £3 million (Skills Development Scotland, 2020). Employers paying the levy in Scotland can apply for a flexible training fund that covers up to £15,000 of training costs for staff. This implementation of the apprenticeship levy's distribution is something decided by the Scottish Government and the institutions in Scotland.

The implementation appears to aim to increase the demand for training in companies and to encourage uptake of apprentices. The companies paying the apprenticeship levy are thus already paying for the training in this arrangement, and they can apply to utilise some of the funds that they invest in the system by themselves. This approach to utilise the funds is consistent with the priorities of Scottish VET policy as it contributes to the aim of employer engagement and encouragement of skills demand, both of which have been features of Scottish skills policy for several years (Payne, 2009; Wood et al., 2014).

3.3 Developing the Young Workforce strategy and the role of apprenticeships in it

This section outlines the Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) strategy's aims and mechanisms that it introduces to achieve the desired goals (Scottish Government, 2014a). Discussion begins with an outline of the aims of the policy, the measures introduced in the policy, and how the measures are causing the intended effects in theory. After that, the section examines how the strategy affects Modern Apprenticeships, which are separate from the DYW strategy but play an important part in it.

The DYW strategy is a 7-year program that was started in 2015 and was due to run until 2021. However, it is still effectively going on at the start of 2023. The key documentation for understanding DYW policy are the national policy strategy (Scottish Government, 2014a) and a commission report that acted as the basis for the strategy (Wood et al., 2014). These two are used as core documents in the analysis of DYW and its programme logic. Other documentation, such as implementation documentation and annual progress reports are also used in some areas of the analysis, but these core documents to explain how the policy has taken the shape that it currently has at the time of writing (year 2023).

3.3.1 Aims of the DYW strategy

Unlike the smaller policies that have directly targeted young adults out of work or education after schooling (Opportunities for All! and Youth Guarantee; Sandy, 2020; Scottish Government, 2012), DYW is presented as a comprehensive strategy attempting to rework how general education is connected to work. However, much like the aims of the smaller policies, the headline goal of the DYW policy is to reduce youth unemployment. This is emphasised in the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that are used to measure the success of the policy. The policy contains 11 numbered KPIs plus an 'overarching target'. Some of the key KPIs are outlined in here but they are all listed in full in the DYW policy strategy documentation (Scottish Government, 2014a). In this discussion I will be outlining the KPIs relevant to this research and the measures taken to achieve them.

The 'overarching target' of the strategy is "to reduce the level of youth unemployment (excluding those in full-time education) by 40 per cent by 2021 (Scottish Government 2014, p.39). This headline target is emphasised by the first two numbered KPIs. Those seek to make Scotland be among the "top five performing countries in the EU for youth unemployment" when measured both in relative ratio of youth unemployment as well as in youth unemployment rate (Scottish Government 2014, p. 39).

These KPIs combined show that strategy examines the issue of youth unemployment from two perspectives: domestically and comparatively. The main target outlines the youth unemployment reduction target in domestic terms, while the two targets following the main target frame the issue in comparative language in Europe. Thus, the goal is to make sustained changes relative to other countries rather than just reduction of unemployment compared to the pre-crisis levels. This already hints at the ambitions of the strategy to produce more lasting changes that make the Scottish system be one of the top performers in Europe.

The next three KPIs indicate what the strategy tries to do to achieve the youth unemployment reduction. These KPIs involve having more school leavers attaining vocational qualifications above SCQF (Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework) level 5 (KPI 3), having a higher percentage of young college students going into employment or higher-level study (KPI 4), and having more Modern Apprenticeships starts by 2021. Additionally, it seeks to have two-thirds of the MA starts to be at NVQ level 3 or above, targeting the intermediate skills gap discussed earlier in this Chapter.

The strategy seeks to address the general education system, colleges, and apprenticeships together in a single package. Due to limited scope I can cover in this study, I will not be discussing the college side of the strategy. However, it is good to be aware that the strategy involves different parts of the education system and labour market interacting with each other.

The final 6 KPIs have a target for employers and 5 targets for equity issues in vocational education. The 6th KPI seeks to "Increase the percentage of employers recruiting young people directly from education" (Scottish Government 2014, p. 40). This would include both those recruited for full-time employment and those who are MAs apprentices since the latter are considered to work for the employer rather than be in education. This combined with the earlier three KPIs gives us a good idea of how strategy seeks to reduce youth unemployment: get more young people to go into full time labour and apprenticeships – especially MAs above NVQ Level 3 – and get young people choose taught vocational education in colleges. Using both vocational education pathways, the strategy seeks to have more people go into vocational education. These goals are consistent with the political goals of the SNP throughout their time in government, as was discussed in Section 3.2.

Finally, we touched on the 5 KPIs that deal with issues of equity. These KPIs contain goals to increase gender parity in most skewed vocational programmes, to increase number of MA starts from minority ethnic communities, increasing employment rates for young disabled people, and increasing 'positive destinations' for looked after children (Scottish Government, 2014a). All these KPIs are quantified, but the specific targeted rates are not crucial for our discussion about the aims of the policy. What is important is that the aim is not only that the policy measures increase youth employment, but that the increases occur across the age cohorts, reaching minority groups and addressing existing gender parities.

The DYW strategy has a clear set of targets which contribute to achieving its overall policy aim, the reduction of youth unemployment. The hypothesis of DYW appears to be the following: Youth unemployment levels go down if the supply of vocational skills is increased at a sufficiently high level and when employers utilise the skills of young adults more. The KPIs focus primarily on the skills supply side, but there are KPIs that also address the demand side of the skills system. The KPI specifically seeks to increase the employers' rate of employee recruitment directly from education.

The assumption, therefore, appears to be that young adults with vocational education and training are attractive to employers and are more likely to be recruited directly from their educational institutions. The strategy appears to consider the apprenticeship offering to be of good quality without any need to change the MA training. This results in the strategy emphasising smoother pathways into the apprenticeships (and other VET offerings). The strategy also highlights the role that careers information, advice, and guidance (CIAG) has in communicating the availability and value of the opportunities to young people (Scottish Government, 2014a). The figure 3.3 below summarises the interpreted logic of the strategy discussed in this section.

FIGURE 3.3 SUMMARY OF THE DYW STRATEGY'S INTERPRETED LOGIC OF INCREASING THE MODERN APPRENTICESHIPS AND VET OPTIONS' POPULARITY

Introduction of greater levels of partnership activities

Foundation apprenticeships

Graduate apprenticeships

Employer engagement with Schools through partnerships

Partnerships with Colleges

Increased exposure to a range of career opportunities and pathways

The employer activities, such as visits to schools, make a wider range of career opportunities visible

Wider visibility of options results in better informed young adults

The improvement of Career Information, Advice, and Guidance (CIAG) activities

Different pathways into careers highlighted as part of the CIAG activities

The information of the pathways and career options allows the young adults to make better informed choices and consider all the options available to them

Better informed young adults

Young adults are more aware of the value of the Apprenticeships offering (and VET options more generally)

More young adults are aware that the apprenticeships pathway could suit them

More young adults engaged with the VET pathways, including the MA pathway

As a result of being aware of the benefits of the different pathways, more young adults seek to pursue apprenticeships and VET

3.3.2 The role of partnership activities

The strategy measures relevant for apprenticeships pathway in DYW are outlined in the DYW strategy documentation (Scottish Government, 2014a) and the reasoning behind some of the measures is further elaborated in the Education Working For All! commission report that the policy is based on (Wood et al. 2014). The strategy introduces various measures which seek to change both the structure of the apprenticeships pathway and the communication of the options through CIAG activities. One of the key changes in the policy is the increased emphasis on partnership activities between schools and employers as well as schools and colleges. The discussion in this section focuses on the former as it is more central to the exposure to different careers while in school, but the latter form of partnerships is outlined briefly.

The partnerships between schools and employers

The focus on partnerships between different parties and existing institutions, and especially between the co-operation between education and world of work, is a central feature of the DYW strategy. This is emphasised both in the commission report (Wood et al. 2014, p.4, p.6) and the DYW strategy document (Scottish Government, 2014a, p. 4). The DYW strategy document is especially emphasising how the implementation is going to be achieved by bringing together the pre-existing structures of Curriculum for Excellence, regionalised college system, Modern apprenticeships, and employer engagement (Scottish Government 2014, p.ii).

School-employer partnerships are envisioned to be done as part of the Curriculum for Excellence (CoE) programme and would be monitored through Management Board and Implementation Group for CoE (Scottish Government 2014, p.10). The partnerships would be created in partnerships with SDS, Education Scotland, the Scottish Funding Council, and local authorities, all of which were pre-existing entities now with a new role in the partnership work.

The practical form of the partnerships between schools and employers (along with other partnering organisations outlined above) can take many forms. These include a new foundation apprenticeship (more in Section 3.3.3), learning activities with more direct employment related connection, better knowledge regarding routes to work among educational staff in schools and colleges, and more vocational qualifications in school (Scottish Government 2014, p. 11-12). The aims include having all actors be better informed

of the vocational routes to work, promotion of wider range of options available for young people, and "change of perceptions of the value of work related learning and qualification" (Scottish Government 2014, p.11). Thus, the partnership work seeks to change the perception of the VET offering, including apprenticeships, through exposure and improved CIAG activities. The attractiveness of VET is expected to increase as the relevant actors know more about the offering. This indicates the policy makers' confidence in the quality of the core VET offering and an identified weakness in the communication of information and perception of VET. Therefore, the partnership activities are a way to provide more contact points between employers and young people. i.e. potential future employees in order to produce the desired changes in perception.

It is noteworthy that the approach of partnerships work between existing actors and introduction of new or adjusted tasks for the actors demonstrates well the institutional path dependency in this process (Hay, 2008). While the policy programme is ambitious and spans 7-years, the programme relies on pre-existing institutions which are instructed to work together in new ways. The new institutions created as part of the policy are ones with primarily oversight and coordination functions (Scottish Government, 2014a). Therefore, the changes are largely incremental. While the policy seeks to bring in employers into the education system as more involved partners, much like the Collective Market Economy systems like Germany do (Busemeyer and Trampusch, 2011a; Hall and Soskice, 2001b; Hall and Thelen, 2009), the strategy does not involve means that would force them to engage, only new structures to arrange partnerships through. As noted by Valiente and colleagues, the success of the strategy in many ways relies on employer engagement but the tools that the strategy has to incentivise the employers are less powerful than the ones that the SG has for local actors and colleges (Valiente et al., 2020b).

The partnerships between schools and colleges

Second significant partnership included in the policy is that between schools and colleges. This partnership is specifically attempting to reduce barriers between schooling and colleges, allowing young people in schools to experience vocational training (Scottish Government 2014, p.15-17). Like the employer-schools partnership, this is conducted within the existing structures. However, this is a partnership that national actors have more control over as it is monitored through existing college outcome agreements.

Much like the previous partnership above, the school-colleges partnership aims to bring in more exposure to vocational pathway while the young people are still in schooling as well as better information for both young people and parents. While this study does not examine colleges directly, they are one of the training providers in apprenticeships, the partnerships between colleges and schools are important for early school leavers' transitions, they form and part of the VET offering that is being promoted in DYW (Canduela et al., 2010; Scottish Government, 2014a). This is why the greater emphasis on school-college partnerships is highlighted here before discussing foundation apprenticeships.

3.3.3 Apprenticeships pathway in the DYW strategy

This section discusses how the apprenticeships pathway is adjusted in the DYW strategy, and how the pre-existing parts of the pathway fit the strategy aims. The discussion outlines three forms of apprenticeships that play a role in DYW. These are Foundation Apprenticeships, Graduate Apprenticeships, and Modern Apprenticeships.

Foundation apprenticeships

Foundation apprenticeships (FAs) were brought in as part of DYW and were meant to be piloted during the first two years of the strategy's timescale. FAs were envisioned as an entry level step for aspiring apprentices and as a way for young people to experience work-based learning (Scottish government 2014). This experience of work-based learning while still in school could be done during senior years of compulsory education. This was specifically to try and bridge the gap between senior years of education and apprenticeship training, and to allow for work-based learning while the young people were still in school. As such, it resembles the school-college partnerships but also the education-employer connections in the German dual-system, but in a smaller scale (Deissinger, 2019a; Hoxtell, 2019).

While called apprenticeships, FAs are technically not full apprenticeships as the person in training is not employed by the company hosting the work-based learning. Instead, FAs are an offering directed to pupils in S5 and S6, lasting 1 to 2 years within the framework of the curriculum of excellence to provide more practical, work-based learning while the young people are still in school (Skills Development Scotland, 2018a). Each FA is equivalent to a higher in the academic path in Scottish secondary education (Skills Development Scotland, 2018a). While the training is naturally likely to be of interest to young adults who are interested in doing an MA after school, it is open for any young person that is interested in

completing a foundation apprenticeship even if they were aiming to follow another pathway, such as HE(Skills Development Scotland, 2018a).

As outlined earlier, FAs emerged from the recommendations made by the commission about young workforce training in Scotland (Wood et al., 2014). The recommendation was made several reasons, but one important reason was to provide young people an opportunity to try work-based learning while still in schooling. This ties two of the DYW policy aims outlined earlier. The first of these is the aim to make the option more familiar for the young people as they consider their options for training after schooling and to give young people a broader view of career pathways while in schooling. This would provide another avenue for work experience and a proper look into work-based learning. Additionally, the FAs were introduced to provide the young people with further avenues to develop career readiness skills, which are deemed important no matter which pathway to work they take (Skills Development Scotland, 2018a; Wood et al., 2014)

Before FAs, the default apprenticeship pathway starting point was often the MA. One issue with this arrangement was that it could be started only after secondary schooling. This meant that before compulsory schooling was finished, young people did not have much exposure to apprenticeship options nor the way in which learning took place in an apprenticeship. Through FAs young people could already make connections to potential employers – benefits of which also apply to employers seeking young talent – and to showcase their capabilities of being in a workplace environment. Therefore, a part of the FAs appears to be to ensure that there are "clear routes into apprenticeships" though the FAs and pre-apprenticeships (Scottish Government 2014, p.20). This also suggests that unfamiliarity of apprenticeship mode of learning was a potential identified factor that limited the popularity of apprenticeships and MAs specifically.

Another reason for implementing FAs in school could be to make the apprenticeship option more visible and with increased parity compared to the higher education option. This is partially done through valuing it the same way as a higher-level subject. This could be a way to remedy an identified issue with the parity perception of the different options, as was later identified in the Learner Journey Review (Scottish Government, 2018).

Finally, as foundation apprenticeships provide a bridge between classroom based schooling and modern apprenticeships, they are also a bridge to work environments more generally. Since foundation apprenticeships can be completed as part of schooling, it allows young

people to gain job experience and practical job experience before leaving school. This ties to the aim to “ensuring a wide range of work-related learning from the early years onwards with increased high quality vocational pathways in senior phase” (Scottish Government, 2014, p 9) with aim to bring about “more effective joint working between schools, colleges, training providers and employers.” (Scottish Government, p 4).

SDS is responsible for the governance of FAs, just like it is responsible for MAs and graduate apprenticeships (GA). The number of frameworks on offer are more limited in the FA offering compared to MA. While this is limiting the function of FA to be a vehicle to gain experience of different kinds of work, it is understandable that the offering is more limited at this stage soon after its introduction compared to the well-established MA programmes. The expectation was that up to 5000 young people will do Foundation Apprenticeships in 2020 academic year (Scottish Government, 2022; Skills Development Scotland, 2018a), which also reflects the smaller scale of the program compared to MAs.

Graduate apprenticeships

First called Advanced apprenticeships, Graduate apprenticeships are the graduate level apprenticeships offering at the top of the skills ladder in apprenticeships pathway (Skills Development Scotland, 2021b). These apprenticeships seek to bridge industries and higher education to bring in degree level training while the person in training is employed, or if there is a desire to work while learning (Skills Development Scotland, 2021b). The graduate apprenticeships are providing degree level training that is geared towards needs of the industry that the employer occupies, and they are done through employer-university partnerships (Skills Development Scotland, 2021b). The argument for the GA offering is that degree-level apprenticeships have been driving economic growth internationally, thus the main argument for the apprenticeships is an economic one. It is also seeking to bring in a stronger vocational element to degree level studies to complement the academic higher education (Skills Development Scotland, 2021b).

The sectors for which the GAs are offered at the time of writing are in the targeted growth sectors. This means that Digital/ICT, data science, cyber security, engineering, and construction are targeted as the initial sectors for the offering (Skills Development Scotland, 2021b). The focus was an explicit goal of the graduate apprenticeships in the DYW documentation to provide higher levels of skills particularly in STEM subjects (Scottish

Government, 2014, p.20). The offering of GAs is set to be on top of the apprenticeship pathway in Scotland and it is done in partnership with the industry needs.

In a way GAs are a manifestation of the DYW central aims regarding apprenticeships. It seeks to bring employers into education and training as a significant partner and especially in intermediate to high skills, latter of which the GAs seek to contribute. This way the GAs add a route to further and different employer engagement with the skills system. Additionally, the GA offering will seek to contribute to the targeted increase of the ratio of level 3 and above apprenticeships of the whole apprenticeship offering.

This programme has only recently been implemented and is not a focus of this study. Therefore, the existence of the GA as a higher-level qualification available on the apprenticeship pathway is the focus in the analysis. The study thus examines if the introduction of this type of apprenticeships contributes to the attractiveness of MAs or the apprenticeships pathway to young adults.

MAs in DYW

The final piece of the apprenticeship pathway, and the piece least affected by the DYW strategy, are the MAs. The strategy does not change MA offering, opting instead to introduce the new forms of apprenticeships around the MAs. However, as MAs form the core of Scottish work-based learning they are an important element for DYW. Three of the eleven KPIs in DYW are tied to performance of MAs in some way. First of the KPIs has two goals. One is simply about increasing the number of MA starts from around 15500 at the start of the policy implementation in 2014/15 semester to 30000 by the end of 2021, while the second aim is to increase the percentage of people completing MAs of at least SCQF level 3 to 66% (Scottish Government, 2014a). This is an important KPI for the policy as it is the quantitative measure for the successfulness of policy measures to attract more people into MAs and specifically to the higher skilled MAs. This is in some way a return to the original vision of the MAs before subsequent reforms allowed for level 2 apprenticeships within the structure of MAs, as was briefly discussed in Section 3.2. Thus, the popularity of MAs is also a measure of success for many of the other policy measures that do not involve MAs directly but are indicative of the health of the VET offering in Scotland.

The role of graduate apprenticeships and FA's as complementary structures to MA appears to also serve the purpose of making Scottish apprenticeships generally more appealing and to allow companies to train their staff within the apprenticeships frameworks (Scottish

Government, 2014a; Skills Development Scotland, 2018b). For apprentices, these changes have made it theoretically possible for one to access training all the way to master's degree level within the apprenticeship structures and to gain a higher education qualification while in employment (Skills Development Scotland, 2021b). Whether the introduction of GAs influences young adults' choice to go into MA training is yet not known, but it is something that this study seeks to examine. However, to comprehensively answer that requires a long-term examination once the programme has been fully implemented and embraced by the employers.

Therefore, the fundamental communications strategy in DYW regarding apprenticeships appears to be a focus on raising the profile of apprenticeships and extending the theoretical route one can take within the pathway. However, the aim is to not have a person be completely tied to the apprenticeship pathway, since the focus appears to be in ensuring "that there are clear routes into apprenticeships in key and growth areas, for those in school through foundation apprenticeships …" to MAs and GAs (Scottish Government 2014, p. 20). This suggests that the apprenticeship option is to stand alongside the academic offering with increased parity. Additionally, apprenticeships will have more progress potential than before when coupled with the GAs, which could attract more employers to utilise apprenticeships.

The aims of the policy are not limited to just getting more young people into the apprenticeship pathway. While the emphasis on the key economic areas for growth in MAs strengthens the economic focus of the policy, the policy also has substantial equity goals. There are two KPIs that are tied to the equity goals: one for more balanced gender participation in MA programmes and increased number of MA starts from minority ethnic communities. Therefore, the aims of DYW regarding MAs was to make the option more popular, increase the intake of apprentices especially in key growth sectors, and to do it in a more equitable and less stereotyped way.

One of the main ways to achieve the aims above was through better efforts to inform young people. DYW aims to achieve this by targeting schools and careers advice. While this is important for getting people into apprenticeships, the change is more fundamental than just promotion of MAs. A persistent problem in Scottish, and UK education, has been the disparate valuation of vocational education and academic education (Ryan and Lőrinc, 2018; Sims, 2004). As such, a closer parity of perception between the different pathway options is required (Scottish Government, 2018), and the component briefly outlined next is in a key role in achieving that goal.

3.4 Scottish Career Information, Advice and Guidance services, the Learner Journey and the role of CIAG in the transitions

Career Information, Advice, and Guidance (CIAG) provided to young people in schools is a significant component of the DYW strategy (Scottish Government, 2014a) even though the practices established before the strategy. The CIAG elements, from Career guidance to how different career options are visible in school through teachers' practice and the partnership activities, are seemingly the mechanisms that translate the structural changes described above into changes in the attitudes and perceptions towards the VET offering, as was discussed earlier in this section. Therefore, the engagement with the young adults and the CIAG components are at the core of the strategy.

DYW strategy's emphasis on careers guidance, and the emphasised aim to make the CIAG element more comprehensive, stems from the commission report (Scottish Government, 2014, p.13, p.35). The emphasis on careers services centres on better and more labour market relevant information for the young people for them to make the best decisions for themselves (Scottish Government, 2014). Thus, the perceived issue with the career service up to that point has not been the way it helps young adults realise their skills, but on the information about the labour market conditions to make choices that lead to better labour market outcomes. As outlined earlier, the strategy recognises that careers service is not the only part of the CIAG environment which affects the young adults' choices. As such, the strategy addresses the whole CIAG structure, which includes the practice of teachers and even employers as part of the partnership activities. This means that partnerships between parties are important, and involvement of young people, carers, parents, practitioners and employers is seen to be crucial for the offering, promotion and delivery of modern apprenticeships (Scottish Government, 2014, p.20).

As discussed earlier in Section 3.3.1, the assumption in DYW appears to be that as young people learn more about the apprenticeships option it becomes more appealing. Enhancement of perception is central and done through engagement with those participating in the scheme. This involves engagement of parents, teachers, and practitioners, and other influencers to understand better the benefits of these options to both those who participate and to their employers (Scottish Government, 2014, p.20). The involvement of these different actors is also envisioned to occur throughout the young adults' time in the education system, i.e. throughout the young adults' learner journey across the different stages.

An important piece of the improved career information provisions is the relaunch of My World of Work (Scottish Government, 2014b). This resource is intended to be used by both different influencers (including career advisors, teachers, and even parents) and young people themselves (Education Scotland, 2015d; Skills Development Scotland, 2022c). The service and its envisioned usage highlight the emphasis on providing young adults, and different supporting actors, with up-to-date information. For that reason, I am interested in studying how actors providing information and resources influence young adults' decision-making, and how young adults use these resources either on their own or with influencers.

My World of Work is also intended to help young adults develop their Career Management Skills, which is discussed further next as the purpose of the CIAG system is outlined briefly.

Purpose of CIAG

CIAG in Scotland is in part a supporting structure to support the Scottish Government's Economic Strategy targets. These include the aim to increase sustainable economic growth and to reach high levels of employment (Scottish Government, 2011). The aim of the service is to help achieve the aforementioned goals by providing an all-age, universal provision of Career information, advice, and guidance (Scottish Government, 2011). The service is thus situated to provide career information, advice, and guidance to anyone who might need it. This is done in order to help them not only get employed, but to make *informed decisions* based on information and understanding that reflects the changing economy and society (Scottish Government, 2011). The term informed decision emphasises that the person receiving the CIAG service is still making the decisions, but with support from the services for the person to make the most of their situation. This same emphasis on informed decisions is also an element in the DYW strategy (Scottish Government, 2014b).

Career services begin their interactions with young people from an early age. The Career Education Standard (3-18; Education Scotland, 2015) outlines how the DYW and the careers services work together. The careers related support starts from when person is at age 3. In the early years the guidance is not directly about careers. The service is instead about creating an environment where the young people are exposed to information about how subjects might tie to some careers, and through activities that highlight different careers. This is done as part of the *Curriculum for Excellence* framework, which was also outlined earlier in this chapter.

Later in young persons' journeys the services, including careers guidance, emphasise building the required Career Management Skills (CMS;Education Scotland, 2015). Aim of

the CMS is to help individuals be aware of their strengths, their preferences, resources available to them, and how they can utilise all these elements together to navigate their career journeys (Education Scotland, 2015). Combining the CMS approach with relevant labour market information seeks to enable young adults to make best decisions for themselves both as they are leaving school, but also throughout their careers (Education Scotland, 2015). This aim is also voiced in the DYW strategy document in following way: "with support of careers professional, teachers, and other practitioners, young people and parents will be more informed about routes into work, careers planning and employment opportunities." (Scottish Government 2014, p. 11). Thus, the connection between the CIAG offering and the DYW policy is strong in the policy language.

Therefore, career services are not intended to be an entity that directs young people to destinations that the government might want to direct young people. This includes not directing young people towards vocational pathway in order to achieve the DYW goals. By emphasising an independent and, informed, and impartial (Scottish Government, 2011) information as one of the means for delivering the policy aims of increased vocational route attendance (including apprenticeships), the policy is signalling clear belief in the core vocational offering.

This study will aim to gain an understanding of how the CIAG service is delivered in schools through careers advisors, who are one of the key people in delivering the career management skills to young adults, as well as through other actors in school environments. Additionally, the study seeks to understand if and how the implementation of CIAG support in schools supports the DYW strategy's aims in supporting young adults' transitions to work.

3.5 Summary of Chapter 3

In this Chapter I have outlined the historical context for the role of apprenticeships in the Scottish skills system, the role that apprenticeships have today, and what the key strategy Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) attempts to achieve through different measures. The strategy seeks to reduce young adults' unemployment and appears to try to achieve this by addressing the visibility and parity perceptions of VET options and by increasing work-readiness of school leavers. An important element of the strategy involves bringing in employers into schools as partners in the Careers Information, Advice, and Guidance (CIAG) activities, which try young adults to be better informed about their career options and

pathways into work. The pre-existing CIAG activities also play an important role in fostering career skills among the young people and ensuring that they get the information that they need to make their career choices.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the ontological and epistemological positioning of the study, its research methodology, and the methods utilised to answer the research questions. The discussion draws from the empirical and theoretical literature discussed in Chapter 2, and from the Scottish policy context contained in Chapter 3. Section 4.2 starts with a summary of the research rationale and outlines both research questions and objectives of the research. Section 4.3 contains the conceptual framework used to interpret and analyse the findings. Section 4.4. presents the methods used to collect data for the study, which is followed by section 4.5 containing an outline of the participant recruitment and the process of accessing the potential pool of participants. Section 4.6 contains a discussion on the piloting process of the research design and how the study was adapted after piloting. Section 4.7. outlines some of the ethical issues and considerations for the study, followed by a reflection on the researcher positionality in Section 4.8. The chapter finishes with a summary in Section 4.9.

4.2 Research rationale, research questions and objectives of the study

Research Rationale

Chapter 2 literature review showed the prevalence of interest towards young adults' educational decision-making and its different elements, such as aspiration formation and the roles of agential and structural factors in decision-making. These are relevant not only for academic debates but for policy making and agendas in Scottish and global contexts. The literature review examined how different approaches, including Rational Choice and structuralist approaches, have contributed to our understanding of young adults' decision-making. However, in some ways the understanding is still limited. As such, there is a gap in our understanding of how young adults navigate the different challenges they face through reflexive decision-making and how different influencers contribute to the process.

The literature review outlined how young adults' transitions from school to work have become more precarious and complex in some ways over time. This has led to some authors suggest that young adults' agency is the most important factor in deciding their career journeys (Beck et al., 1992). Some versions of the Rational Choice Theory also suggested that rational decision-making is the key in choices, with cost-benefits assessments of the

options playing a key role. However, this lack of recognition of both structural factors and intrinsic motivations in decision-making has been critiqued (Glaesser and Cooper, 2014; Hatcher, 1998; Powell and McGrath, 2019), as was discussed in Chapter 2. While the differences between young adults from middle class and working class backgrounds has become more nuanced, socioeconomic factors still do matter in educational outcomes (Atkinson, 2007; Furlong, 2009). However, the view that the socioeconomic background results in differences in the capacity to make decisions reflexively (Atkinson, 2010a; Threadgold and Nilan, 2009) has been more controversial and challenged by authors like Archer (Archer, 2012, 2007)

These approaches have their weaknesses when investigating how young adults' subjectively formulated priorities (e.g. aspirations) regarding their careers are being reflexively construed and executed amidst different constraints and enablements that emerge from structural factors (Archer, 2012). The review showed the importance of understanding what the young adults sought to achieve via their post-school educational choices and how the fields containing the influencers affect the young adults' decision-making via information, support towards certain young adults' choices, and connections to potential opportunities.

Critical Realist approach has been identified as one good framework for examining young adults' agency and reflexive decision-making, the effects of structural environment (which includes influencers) constraining and enabling agency, and how the two interact together (Baker, 2019). As such, this research utilised a framework that was based on the CR approach to examine the way young adults reflexively make educational choices, what their subjective projects are in decision-making, and how do influencers as part of the structural context affect that decision-making. The CR approach is well-suited for examining the agential elements and reasons for pursuing educational options while also acknowledging the constraining and enabling effects of structural factors.

The focus in this study is on young adults' decision-making and how they choose to pursue apprenticeships pathway into careers. As discussed in Chapter 3, the vocational options like Modern Apprenticeships (MAs) have often been in the shadow of the academic pathway in Scotland. However, vocational routes like MAs are important as they can make a difference in young adults' lives as Powell and McGrath (2019) have argued. Thus, it is important to understand why young adults seek Modern Apprenticeship (MA) training for themselves, what they seek to fulfil via that pathway choice, and how the different circumstances young adults faced influenced the reflexive decision-making. MAs constitute a significant part of

the Scottish Developing the Young Workforce strategy (Scottish Government, 2014a), which seeks to bolster the VET routes to work. The role of VET in the strategy is viewed predominantly as means to address youth unemployment when examining the policy goals, as discussed in Chapter 3. However, as discussed in both Chapters 2 and 3, both the DYW strategy and earlier research raise important considerations on how VET options can improve well-being among young people. This emphasises that the issue is not important for purely economic reasons, but also for understanding the value that the young adults seek from MA opportunities.

I seek to elaborate on the role influencers have in young adults' educational decision-making. Different influencers have been examined before, but I seek to focus especially on how institutional influencers can contribute to young adults' decision-making, which – as discussed in Chapter 2 – is an area that is in some ways less understood. Therefore, a focus of the study is on how influencers – and especially institutional influencers present in school and other institutions with roles to influence young adults' career choices – affect young adults' decision-making in different contexts. This is important not only in understanding how the structural effects of fields such as school are exerted by the young adults, but also because this elucidates how young adults experience the value of different opportunities that they have a freedom to pursue. This in turn potentially affects which routes the young adults choose to pursue to transform their capabilities into functionings in capabilities approach terms.

Research objectives

This research has several objectives, which are sought to be completed through the research questions. As outlined in Chapter 1, the objectives of the research were: 1) to understand why young adults in Scotland seek MA training, 2) to understand who are the key influencers for the young adults' journeys from school to apprenticeships and how the influencers affect the journeys at different points in time; 3) to examine how the implementation of the Developing the Young Workforce policy has affected the young adults' decision-making environment and; 4) to further the understanding of the young adults' journeys, the barriers they face, and how support from various institutions and influencers is used to address the barriers. These objectives are investigated through examination of young adults' transition journey into Modern Apprenticeships in Scotland as well as through examination of some of the key CIAG elements and influencers that are part of the CIAG environment in Scotland.

Research questions

The research questions of the study were introduced in Chapter 1 and are formulated from the questions posed by the literature outlined in Chapters 2 and 3. The research questions that this study seeks to answer are listed underneath and each question is briefly discussed individually.

RQ1: What are the main reasons for young adults to seek apprenticeship training?

This research question concerns with the debates on aspirations and the reasons for why young adults would pursue specific educational options in their journeys. A key theoretical debate that this research question addresses is the extent to which young adults utilise instrumental rationality versus intrinsic preferences in their educational choices. The assumption in human capital theory, as well as in forms of the rational choice theory, is that people make instrumentally rational decisions to maximise the economic return to their investment in education and training ().

As discussed in Chapter 2, some earlier research disputes this view and posits that the motivations of the young adults can include fulfilling intrinsic preferences and aspirations that go beyond instrumental rationality. As part of the analysis, I will be examining the motivations at different points of the young adults' decision-making. The study seeks to investigate why the young adults chose to pursue MA training at the specific time in their journeys and what the potential structural factors contributing to the reasons were. This way the role of challenges that the young adults might be facing – such as need for income or inability to move to a different location – are accounted for in the analysis of the choices.

The DYW policy does not explicitly state an assumption about young adults' reasons to choose a MA training. The policy's aims to broaden the range of careers visible to young adults could be argued to assume that personal strengths and interests are assumed to affect the educational and training choices. However, as the main explicit goal of the policy is to improve employability and to offer training especially for growth sectors, it can also be argued that the approach assumes instrumental motivations that the human capital approach presumes in young adults' decision-making. So, while the policy's main concern is young adults' employability and positive destinations for young adults, the methods of matching young adults to careers that interests them appears to go beyond the instrumental rationality assumptions.

Research questions 2 and 3 are closely connected to each other and are thus discussed together.

RQ2. Who are the key influencers to young adults and at what stages of their journeys?

RQ3. In what ways do the influencers affect young adults' decision-making about their post-compulsory education and training?

The literature review in Chapter 2 outlined some of the key influencers that have been identified in past research. These influencers included parents and relatives (Brooks, 2003; Seghers et al., 2019), peers (Brooks, 2003; Delay, 2022), teachers (D'Angelo and Dollinger, 2021), as well as career advisors and other career professionals (D'Angelo and Dollinger, 2021). In addition to the outlined research, the DYW policy in Scotland includes some key people with roles to support and influence young adults. The policy emphasises the quality and availability of information so that young adults can make informed decisions about their careers, and as such actors that have a potential role in providing said information as well as support in achieving opportunities are in an important role. The policy identifies similar people, including parents, peers, teachers, career advisors, but also employers (Scottish Government, 2014a).

The question is important also theoretically in the academic literature, as the influencers are in part exerting structural effects on the young adults' decision-making and can provide either barriers or enablements to the young adults. Earlier research in this field has indicated that the key influencers can for example contain social capital that benefits the young adults, cultural capital in form of information that helps in making choices, and economic capital that can address potential barriers.

I seek to contribute to the research by examining which influencers are in a key role at different points in the young adults' journeys and how they contribute to the young adults' reflexive decision-making. As the Scottish policy context ascribes importance to several key actors, I will also be examining the role of some key actors in the school environment and beyond.

RQ 4: How do institutional influencers support and influence young adults when planning and executing an approach to pursue post-school pathway choices?

While the RQs 2 and 3 are focused on influencers more generally, the RQ 4 focuses specifically on institutional influencers who have an ascribed role to influence young adults

in the Scottish skills system. The influencers with an institutional role to influence young adults are of specific interest in the educational context, as the DYW policy is seemingly relying on them to provide information that the young adults are assumed to be using in making the right decisions for themselves (Scottish Government, 2014a). The elements I examine include the provision of information but is not limited to that. I will also be examining if and how the influencers as part of the educational field are encouraging the use of specific modalities of reflexivity as well as transition behaviours.

RQ 5: How are the DYW strategy elements, such as the partnership activities in schools – including the reformed apprenticeships pathway – influencing young adults' choices to pursue Modern Apprenticeships?

The DYW policy appears to assume that the MA offering is attractive to young adults if they are familiar with the format and find that a field that interests them offers apprenticeship training. As was discussed in Chapter 3, this assumption in the policy was identified since the DYW strategy itself does not change the MA pathway in any way, but the policy still seeks to increase the number of MA starts. This indicates that all of the other measures that seek to increase the visibility of different career options and make information more available are the assumed mechanism for the increase in MA starts.

The apprenticeship pathway reforms brought in as part of the DYW change the pathway around the MA offering, and these changes might make it a more appealing option for young adults. As outlined earlier in Chapter 3, the policy appears to also assume that apprenticeships are going to be seen as a more equal alternative to academic study when young adults become familiar with the format, become aware of the range of fields available in apprenticeship training, and possibly because the apprenticeship pathway offers training up to graduate level after the introduction of the Graduate Apprenticeships. This arguably raises the profile of the offering for those that seek opportunities for learning, qualifications, and access to career paths without having to opt for the academic route. As part of the research the effects of these changes are examined in young adults' journeys.

The introduction of foundation apprenticeships is meant to allow the young adults to try out work-based learning while in school, which allows those interested in that form of learning to try it before having to make a choice about their post-schooling education and training, as well as to prepare them for work more generally. This could make the apprenticeship option seem less risky and more desirable after hands-on experience. Additionally, having the

Foundation Apprenticeship be equivalent to a Higher-level subject could improve the perceived parity of apprenticeships and academic options.

4.3 Research design: critical realist examination of young adults' decision-making and influencers

This section outlines the Critical Realist approach as a conceptual framework which is used in this thesis to examine the topic of the study. The first subsection 4.2.1 outlines the Critical Realist approach, which was discussed in Chapter 2 as part of the approaches for researching young adults' decision-making and especially examining the effects of structure and agency in the process. Following the outline of the critical realist approach and its assumptions in the study the operationalisation of important terms is outlined in the subsection 4.2.2.

4.3.1 Critical Realist approach in a qualitative research design

The Critical Realist approach was developed by Archer (Archer, 2012, 2010, 2007, 2003) for social sciences and it has been used successfully in different studies utilising qualitative research designs, including in Archer's own studies. Compared to the quantitative methods, qualitative approaches are often not testing pre-formulated hypotheses. Instead, the methods are used to examine research questions that require an open and flexible design, which also allows for the emergence of findings from narratives that were not expected prior to the study (Howard and Berg, 2017). The qualitative methods put the experiences of the participating individuals at the core of the research and the methods acknowledge that the subjective experiences of the participants are bounded in the lived context.

This study utilises a qualitative research design where semi-structured interviews are at the centre and the framework is based around the Archer's Critical Realist approach. Social research interviews and their focus on the lived experiences of the participants has its roots on the phenomenological approaches in a non-philosophical sense (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). As outlined in Chapter 1, CR is situated the positivist and constructivist approaches ontologically. The approach asserts that there is an objective reality that researchers can study and it operates independently of our activity (Archer et al., 2016; Archer, 2003). Epistemologically the approach suggests that our knowledge of the reality is always situated in historic, cultural, and social contexts (Archer et al., 2016). As such, the approach presumes that there is a social reality that we are investigating, but that the lenses that we can view the reality are not complete, can be flawed, and as such we need to be reflexive during the research process.

From the CR perspective the qualitative design allows for the examination of participants' life journeys, through the description of their experiences and their thought processes, at the time of their decision-making. Participants examine the events retrospectively but can also discuss about their plans going forward and how their aims, aspirations, goals, and ways of thinking and approaching the transition to work has changed across the transition period that they have experienced. As such, these participants can provide a first-hand account of their decision-making and the resources and support they utilised. The data is collected from single interviews with the participants where all the research themes are discussed through semi-structured interviews.

To get a more complete idea of not only the young adults' thinking, but also the thinking of influencers about their practice, its aims and its potential effects, the study includes interviews with participants beyond the young adults. The sampling and the purpose of each population of participants sampled for the study is discussed further in Section 4.4.1. However, the aim of the inclusion of the different groups of participants is to allow for greater breadth of information in the analysis. The discussions with the young adults focuses on their reflexive thinking, the subjectively defined aims and perceived challenges that they faced, which are all important parts of the CR approach (Archer, 2012; Baker, 2019). Interviews with the influencers seeks to gain a greater understanding of what the influencers as agents in their own right seek to achieve through their interactions with the young adults, and how the role that they are in – for example having an institutional role to influence the young adults as a career advisor – affects the way that they approach the interactions. Finally, experts on the Scottish policy are interviewed to add to the understanding of the structural setting that the young adults navigate in Scotland during their transitions and thus the interviews with the experts on the structures add to the understanding of the aims of the structures as well as their function in influencing young adults' decision-making. This approach to examine the young adults' transitions from multiple angles seeks to add to the comprehensiveness of the analysis, especially on how the Scottish policies governing the transitions of the young adults are implemented and how the accounts of the influencers and the young adults compare to each other.

4.3.2 Conceptualisation and operationalisation of the study's framework

The study's framework draws primarily from three theoretical approaches, which have been discussed in Chapter 2 of the thesis. The framework has at its core the Critical Realism (CR

(Archer, 2012, 2010, 2007, 2003) approach and is supplemented with concepts from the Bourdesian structuralist tradition (Bourdieu, 1977; Grenfell, 2012), Evans' transition behaviours (Evans, 2007), and the Capabilities Approach (Bonvin, 2019; Crocker and Robeyns, 2009; Robeyns, 2016). The concepts utilised in the study and the way they are operationalised are discussed below.

The key concepts in the analysis from the CR approach include the reflexivity, reflexive modes, and morphogenesis. **Reflexivity** refers to the internal conversations that decision-makers, in this instance the young adults, have to negotiate their personal projects with the structural circumstances that they occupy (Archer, 2012, 2007, 2003). The reflexive process can occur in different ways, which Archer (Archer, 2012, 2007) has categories into four **reflexive modes**. The modes, discussed further in Chapters 2 and 5, are **autonomous, meta-reflexive, communicative, and fractured** reflexivity. The modes are discussed and outlined in Section 2.2.5. Each of the modes describes a different way to enact reflexive decision-making and differ based on internal vs external conversations, kinds of motivations, independence, and associated social mobility patterns (Archer, 2012, 2007; Dyke et al., 2012). The identification of reflexive mode usage from the young adults' narratives is done by drawing especially from Archer' summary of the modes (Archer 2012, p270-313). Similarly to Baker (2019), I focused on the reasons and motivations in the educational choices, whether their goals implied aims in social mobility, relationship to their natal contexts, responses to constraints and enablements they faced, and the participants' responses to the situational logic of opportunity. In this study the reflexive modes are not necessarily considered to be constant like Archer formulated them initially. Instead, much like in the studies by Dyke and colleagues as well as Baker, reflexive modes are examined as potentially adaptive. Thus, a person could utilise different reflexive modalities over their educational journeys as an adaptive response to the challenges in their context that they navigate (Baker, 2019; Dyke et al., 2012). Thus, reflexivity is analysed by examining the modes of reflexivity from the young adults' accounts of their decision-making as well as from the accounts of influencers in their roles in young adults' decision-making. Through reflexivity the young adults are exerting their **agency**, which refers to the ability or freedom of the actors to set and realise their aspirations through their choices (Evans, 2007).

From the Bourdesian approach the study utilises some of the key 'thinking tools' (Grenfell, 2012) that have been commonly used in research on young adults' decision-making (Atkinson, 2017; Clark and Zukas, 2013). The concepts utilised include field, and the

capitals. **Field** refers to the structural environment that the young adults occupy over the course of their educational and life journeys (Bourdieu, 1977; Grenfell, 2012). Examples of fields include the field of education, and specifically the institutions that the young adults occupy, as well as person's home environment. Each field has its own set of cultural and social practices, capitals, and values which the young people interact with and interpret through discursive practices which potentially inform the young adults' decision-making. These discourses are enacted by influencers, who will be discussed soon.

Capitals in the Bourdesian sense do not refer only to economic capital. In addition to the **economic capital**, which refers to the financial resources that constitute one of the important factors in educational outcomes (Papay et al., 2015). However, the framework contains cultural capital and social capital. These concepts refer to resources much like economic capital, but **cultural capital** instead consists of embodied knowledge, habits, and practices from the fields that they have occupied (Grenfell, 2012). A person can use their cultural capital as a resource to navigate different challenges, such as knowledge about possible educational options and what each of them entails, or to achieve better employability (Clark and Zukas, 2013). **Social capital** refers to social connections that the young adults have in their social network or have access to through contacts in their social network. These contacts can be used to find education or work opportunities or information, among other possible uses. Thus, as Bourdieu has argued, the value of the social capital lies in part in person's ability to convert the social capital into economic or cultural capital (DeJaeghere et al., 2016).

Third framework is the capabilities approach (Nussbaum, 2011; Robeyns, 2016; Sen, 2005, 1985). This framework provides a useful way to examine the extent to which the young adults have capabilities to achieve to achieve their functionings (Bonvin, 2019; Robeyns, 2006; Robeyns and Byskov, 2021). This is utilised in the analysis when examining the motivations of young adults to pursue their preferred fields of work and the way the capabilities – or lack of them – are enabling or constraining the young adults to pursue their preferences. Thus, the capabilities framework is used problematise *what* the young adults value, i.e., what the young adults perceive to valuable. It also allows us to elaborate systematically what the perceived opportunities of the young adults are as well as the freedom to pursue their potentially available opportunities. The framework is also used to discern between the intrinsic and instrumental subjective value or motivation that the young adults attached to their aspirations and goals.

One of the key concepts in the capabilities approach is **capabilities**. They are not a physical or a tangible concept, much like agency or reflexivity. Indeed, one of the criticisms of the capabilities approach is that the operationalisation of terms like capabilities is not certain and left to the researchers (Hart, 2012; Powell and McGrath, 2019). For this study the operationalisation of capabilities is derived from Robeyns' (Robeyns, 2006) definition of capabilities as genuine opportunities or freedoms to realise different functionings. The young adults' understanding of their capabilities, i.e., the freedom they have to pursue their subjectively defined meaningful opportunities, is analysed from the interviews from how the young adults discuss their perceived opportunities.

The **functionings** mentioned earlier are realised beings and doings (Robeyns, 2006) and thus are in a sense the outcomes of the young adults converting their capabilities into functionings. Therefore, functionings can take many forms, but in this study, they include elements such as possession of skills, jobs, or qualifications that the young adults strive for and which enable further capabilities. The **conversion** of a capability into a functioning, is dependent on **conversion factors**. These factors can be personal, social, or environmental and are factors that enable the young adults to turn the valued potential into a concrete outcome. Examples of conversion factors are **personal** and mental characteristics, such as cognitive skills, creativity, age, or gender (Hart, 2012; Robeyns, 2017, 2016). These factors can either enable or restrict the young adults' ability to convert their capabilities into functionings. **Social factors** include elements such as policies supporting young adults, social hierarchies, norms, and power relations, and people in young adults' personal lives (Hart, 2012; Robeyns, 2017). For example, policies providing services and support to young adults to realise their aspirations would be an enabling conversation factor. Finally **environmental conversation factors** are tied to the physical environment where the person lives (Hart, 2012; Robeyns, 2017). For example, available infrastructure enabling transport to get to a job would be such a factor.

The emphasis on individuals' capabilities and the barriers that might result in limitation of capabilities to achieve the desired outcomes makes this framework useful in the study. Especially, the study draws from the approach taken by Dejaeghere (2020) where capabilities are situated not only within an individual but contained within the social environment that the individual resides in and are translated through the conversion factors by the young adults. This is used in the study to examine enabling and hindering effects of different structural

forces in a more systematic way, thus complementing the Critical Realist approach, the utilisation of the Bourdesian analytical tools, and the transition behaviours.

Additionally, the approach is useful for interrogating the concept of skills and individuals' aims as the framework does not make the assumptions contained in human capital theory, where people are presumed to be rational decision-makers seeking to maximise the financial return of their investment to skills (Goldthorpe, 1998; Pantea, 2020). This approach allows the analysis to be more nuanced and to account for varying aims that both the young adults and influencers might have in their actions and on different elements of their aspirations.

Influencers are a key group of agents that the study examines. These people influence the young adults' choices in some ways through their actions. The identification of the influencers is done by examining the young adults' accounts of their educational journeys, examination of policies and the influencers identified in that, as well as from the influencer and policy expert interview accounts. The accounts are compared to see who are identified as key influencers and if the viewpoints differ on who to include. The influencers are divided into two categories for the analysis, which are institutional and personal influencers. As was discussed in Chapter 2, the categorisation is based on work done by Hirschi (2007; Kamm et al. 2020) but adapted to the fit the way different institutional actors work together in the Scottish system.

Therefore, **institutional influencers** are actors who have an institutional role to influence young adults in some ways. Examples of institutional influencers are teachers and career advisors who have a role in the Scottish system to provide information, advice and guidance to young adults in their career choices.

Personal influencers on the other hand are part of the young adults' personal social networks – and thus social capital – and do not have a defined work role to influence the influenced young adults. This group of actors includes parents, siblings, friends and peers among other people that the young adults has access to through their parents' social resources for example.

The influencers can influence the young adults in various ways. The term **influence** is used broadly in the study and constitutes of any actions that in some way affect the young adults' decision-making. For example, if the influencer provides **information** that the young adult uses in their decision-making – for example information about specific careers, apprenticeship opportunities or educational pathways – then the influencer would have influenced the young adult through information. The approach used to examine the types of

information young adults use in their decision-making is adapted from earlier studies where information used in educational choices was classified into 'hot', 'warm', and 'cold' information (Ball and Vincent, 1998; Slack et al., 2014). These types of information differ on the type of source (close personal acquaintance, a relatable distant person, or 'official' source, which could be either material or unrelatable person), as well as type of information (1st or 2nd hand account of experiences vs. official, neutral, factual statements without a personal component). This approach is used to see if the positionality and type of information provided by the influencers affects whether they become important in young adults' decision-making.

Other forms of influence include taking an active part in the young adults' **reflexive decision-making** through the communicative reflexive practices (Archer and Archer, 2012; Archer, 2007, 2003; Baker, 2019; Dyke et al., 2012), and providing some form of support to young adults that encourages or helps them to pursue specific opportunities. Of course, the direction of influence can be negative as well, discouraging the young adults from specific options. This **support** can occur through expressions of support (or lack of support) and practical assistance in the process (such as help with CV or finding opportunities. As such, the support is also a form of social conversion factor, as was outlined earlier in this section. The forms of influence are identified from the young adults' influencers' and policy experts' interviews to see which kinds of actions exerted influence in the young adults' decision-making and which kinds of influencing actions different influencers do in their practice, especially institutional influencers.

4.4 Participant sampling and access

This section describes the sampling criteria for the study and how participants were accessed in the study. The sampling section outlines the sampling criteria for the different participant groups. The access section describes how participants were accessed and outlines the process of participants recruitment for the study.

4.4.1 Sampling and the sample description

The sample of the study consists of three groups of participants: the young adults who chosen to pursue Modern Apprenticeship training; young adults' institutional influencers – consisting of career advisors both in and out of school settings as well as a company recruiter and a

young adults' employability support worker; and finally, policy experts who have played a role in implementing elements of the DYW policy.

As the study is interested in understanding the young adults' decision-making process and the role ways in which different influencers can influence the young adults' decision-making, the aim was to gain insight into the decision-making process and the environment in which the decisions are made via different actors' accounts. The first part of the discussion outlines the way sampling was conducted in the study, how the Covid-19 pandemic affected the sampling of participants, and how the sampling was adapted to respond to the challenges posed by the pandemic.

Sampling process

This study uses two forms of non-probabilistic sampling. To recruit young adults who were apprentices a judgement sampling was utilised. Judgement sampling is a non-random sampling method in which participants are recruited on basis of set characteristics that are of interest to the study or survey being conducted (Corbetta, 2003). The characteristics that were used in the sampling of young adults are detailed underneath. Due to the ongoing covid-19 pandemic at the time of the data-collection (autumn 2020 to spring of 2021), the criteria for study inclusion were broadened. The process for broadening the sample criteria that and its effects on the study are discussed as well. The participant recruitment was conducted in collaboration with Skills Development Scotland and the researcher provided a list of participant criteria and recruitment materials[2] to SDS. The materials distributed using the SDS networks and interested participants could volunteer to be contacted or contact the researcher themselves This method of sampling is used as it allowed the inclusion of broad range of participants that fit the set criteria. The sampling of policy experts was conducted similarly. The area of policy expertise was outlined by the researcher and the SDS sought willing voluntary participants from the areas of expertise, which centred around knowledge of the implementation of the DYW policy, the CIAG implementation in schools, or both.

The sampling of influencers was conducted utilising two approaches. First approach was the judgement sampling outlined above, with the criteria being that the influencers were career advisors working with young adults in either schools, or in career service locations open to the public.

[2] This included the consent form and the participant information sheet, as well as a brief description of the study.

The second approach was snowball sampling, which was used in order to gain access to different influencers that affected the young adults' journeys. The snowball sampling to recruit influencer participants was chosen due to practical constraints in participant access. This was done to access influencers that were not accessible to reach via the SDS connections, which would enable the research to reach influencers who were in a prominent role in the young adults' interview accounts. The snowball sampling was done by asking the young adults – after conducting the interviews with them -- if they were willing to contact the key influencers identified by the young adult in the interviews. If the participant was willing to do that, they were asked to contact the influencer and ask them if the researcher could approach them regarding the study via their preferred email contact or the influencer could contact the researched directly via supplied contact details. If the influencer agreed to be contacted or contacted the researcher themselves, the potential participant was informed about the study and its purposes. If the participant agreed to take part, a time for an interview was scheduled to be contacted remotely, as was the case with the other participants. The responses received by the researcher via this method of sampling were limited to two institutional influencers, possibly due to the Covid-19 pandemic as it caused severe disruptions to people's lives.

The lack of responses from personal influencers was addressed by recruiting additional institutional influencers and additional influencers were recruited using the judgement sampling method which was used to find young adult participants. The researcher provided an information package about the study, which contained the participant information sheet, the consent form, a description of the study and question themes to be discussed in the study. The study was advertised via SDS connections and the contact details of participants willing to be conducted about the study were relayed to the researcher so that further questions about the study could be asked and interviews could be scheduled.

Young adults

The recruitment of young adults in done by targeting young adults between ages 18 and 25 who had started their Modern Apprenticeship training no earlier than August 2019. This way the sample consisted of young adults who were doing their MA training at the time of the study, or had just completed the training. This was done to keep the young adults' recollection of their decision-making process for the MA training as recent as possible.

Initially the study sought to target participants who did their MA in specific sectors of economy – specifically targeting the growth sectors identified by the Scottish Government (Scottish Government, 2015, 2014a). However, the covid 19-pandemic resulted in a lack of responses from the population of participants in these targeted sectors, and the recruitment criteria was subsequently broadened to the factors outlined above. The result of the broadening of the criteria outside the growth sectors was that the sample caught in many ways a more varied set of apprentices, but the sample was also predominantly focused on the business and administration field, as seen in table 4.1. on the next page.

The study sought both young men and women in the study sample to examine any gender differences in the patterns of decision-making, as well as participants from across Scotland, so that the potential effect of local structural factors – such as local industries – was captured in the study. The study sample managed to contain both young men and women in the sample, participants across Scotland, and participants with parents in different occupational roles – who bring different influences and information into the decision-making process via the socioeconomic effects as was discussed in Chapter 2.

The gender split in the sample is not even, but both young men and women are represented in the sample. Six participants in the sample were young men and ten were young women (ages between 18 and 24, average age was 19.5). The apprenticeships pathway group is skewed towards women (5 women, 1 man in the category), but the college and university group have an even gender split. Thus, the sample of participants whose first qualification after school came from an apprenticeships has only one man in the sample. This also means that the transitions that were most affected by the Covid pandemic during schooling are also young women's transitions.

Table 4.1: Young adult participants' MA field of work and initially chosen pathways from school

Field of Work	Number of participants	Apprenticeships pathway	College or university pathway
Business and administration	12	4	8
Hospitality	1	1	
Nursery teacher	1	1	
Youth work	1		1
Career Development	1		1
Total:	16	6	10

The table above shows that for the most part the apprentices worked in business and administration related MAs, which in this case in an umbrella term used to cover business administration, clerical assistance, project management, finance, and project management MAs. Participants in the business and administration MAs had similar training, such as learning to use electronic communications, spreadsheet software, and different management tools effectively. The nursery teaching, tourism and hospitality, and hospitality services MA programmes consisted of training in the relevant tools and methods in their own fields of work, varying from role to role. In terms of participants preferences regarding fields, the analysis focuses on whether they were applying to a field because they found the work to be enjoyable, or for other intrinsic preferences related to the career they are pursuing, regardless of the individual intrinsic elements.

Influencers

The influencer participants consisted of different institutional influencers. From the policy documentation the Career Advisors were identified as one of the key influencer groups as they had a central role in providing careers information, advice, and especially guidance to young adults in the Scottish system. They were also present in every young adult participants' account in some way. Thus, the study recruited career advisors who worked both in schools and outside schools, since the young adults in the study interacted with career advisors in both settings. The interviews with the career advisors focused on their practice of supporting the young adults and how they provide career information that is intended to help the young adults to be better informed to make their choices. The analysis examined if and how the influencers sought to promote specific pathways, transition behaviours, modes of reflexivity, or to guiding the young adults' reflexive decision-making and aspiration formulation in some other way.

Other influencers were invited to take part in the study through snowball sampling after they were identified to be one of the key influencers for a young adult in the study. The interviews with these participants focused similarly on their practice and the ways through which they influenced the young adults, and what the intentions and aims of their practice were. The elements of analysis were the same among other influencers in the study. The influencers that were recruited through the snowball sampling process included a recruiter for a company and

a young adults' employability support worker from a local council in Scotland. In total the study interviewed 11 influencers.

Policy experts

The final group of participants interviewed as part of the study were three policy experts with knowledge of the Scottish CIAG and DYW strategies and their implementation. The experts' specific roles and areas are not identified to protect their anonymity, but they all had knowledge of one or more elements of the DYW strategy and CIAG, including the intent of partnership activities, introduction of new elements to the apprenticeship pathway, and intentions of the CIAG practices in guiding the young adults through their transition to work.

The policy experts were interviewed to gain further insight into the intents of the policy regarding the partnership activities, ways through which the policy is envisioned to influence young adults as a cohort to choose more VET options, and what the role of CIAG and the relevant influencers is to produce a change in the culture where the VET options are seen as inferior to the academic routes among the different actors in the education system.

4.4.2 Access and participants recruitment

The recruitment of participants was done in cooperation with Skills Development Scotland. The main reason for utilising SDS' resources for recruitment of young adults in apprenticeships and career adviser influencers was that SDS had the means to advertise the study to the target population through their email contact network. The researcher supplied the SDS with all the materials needed for participant recruitment: a participant information sheet, additional summary of the study, consent forms, and the profile of the target sample groups so that the study adverts could be directed to the correct channels. The potential participants were then sent the study advert by the SDS alongside the information about the study and the consent form so that the potential participants could inform themselves about the study before making a choice to participate. If a participant were willing to take part they either contacted the SDS, who relayed the contact information of the volunteering participants, or the potential participants could contact the researcher directly using the contact information in the materials sent to them. This approach is consistent with the current privacy legislation in the UK and the GDPR regulations.

Additional recruitment of influencers was done as a form of snowball sampling after interviews with young adults are completed. This is because the key influencers for each

young adult are not known prior to the interview, and in this case the young adults will have the means to contact the potential key influencer participants. If the young adult participants were willing to contact the potential key influencers – and if they had the means to do so – the researcher requested that they ask the potential key influencer if they would be willing to be contacted regarding the study. If they were willing to be contacted, a contact email was requested so that the researcher could send them the package of materials that informed the potential participants about the study and participation. This method of additional influencer sampling yielded two additional participants. Both were institutional influencers who worked with two young adult participants in the study.

Finally, policy experts were also recruited through SDS as they are connected to the organisation and could be contacted by the SDS. The potential participants were provided with information about the study and those who indicated that they wanted to take part in the study communicated their willingness with the SDS. Followed by that SDS transferred the required contact information to the researcher.

All the participants took part in the study voluntarily and each participant indicated their voluntary participation through signed consent forms as well as verbally before the start of the interviews. None of the participants were offered compensation or other form of benefit by either the researcher or the SDS for taking part in the study.

4.5 Data gathering tools and the execution of the research

The primary data in the study is gathered through semi-structured interviews with the participants outlined in section above. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the data collection method for a variety of reasons. First, they are a good and well-established way to examine an issue through an analytical framework while still allowing the interview conversations to be flexible, which is important in the qualitative approach utilised in this study (Howard & Berg, 2017). This flexibility allows the interview to include unforeseen venues of question if they are to arise, and it provides the researcher with options to vary questions of open nature with more targeted questions over the course of an interview.

As this study focuses on young adults' experiences and exploration of their influences over a period of time, an alternative to semi-structured interviews could be an open-ended interview methodology. However, while the open-ended interviews are a good tool for exploring a person's viewpoint in great depth (Howard & Berg, 2017), semi-structured interviews judged to be more suitable for the study due to it being guided by theoretically driven questions

despite the interest in gaining the young adults' viewpoints. This allowed the study guide the discussion towards the research themes and topics that contributed to the research questions while allowing the participants to focus on elements that judged to be important in their transition journeys or elements of their practice as influencers.

It was also judged that the topic of the study lends itself well for one-to-one interviews rather than focus-group style group-interviews. This is because group-interviews are excellent tools for examining interactions within a group and gaining insight how a group might think, whereas this study is more interested in personal decision-making journey and the influencers that have affected the young adult. Additionally, the focus-group design contains a risk that the participants might not be freely discussing about certain elements of their journeys that they do not want to disclose in front of their peers, making the semi-structured interviews a better fit for the study (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009).

The interview schedules for young adults, influencers and policy experts can be found in Appendix B. These schedules outline the themes that were discussed as part of the interviews, but the discussions were not necessarily limited to the topics in the schedules as the semi-structured design allowed the young adults to discuss elements outside the questions as well.

The themes for the young adult interviews were 1) the apprentice training and the prior steps on their journey to apprenticeships from schooling; 2) the motivations and reasons they pursued during their decision-making, especially for the choice to go into apprenticeship, 3) the sources of information they used during their decision-making process, when they began thinking about their options, and the overall approach to decision-making, 4) and finally the important people they discussed their choices with and the barriers that they identified as part of their journeys.

The interviews with the influencers focused on the interactions that the influencers had with the young adults as part of their role as an institutional influencer (including the contexts in which the interactions occur, what is discussed, what support offered, and how the interactions play out), the aims of the service the influencer is providing, and if there are any specific ways the influencers seek to influence or support the young adults in their journeys.

The policy expert interviews focused on understanding how the Developing the Young Workforce strategy and the CIAG were a part of the policy expert's role, the aims of the DYW strategy from their perspective, what changes the strategy has had on the CIAG, the changes that are yet to occur, and the challenges that have been encountered during the

lifecycle of the policy, including potential upcoming challenges. The interview schedules were developed through a piloting process, which is outlined next.

4.6 Piloting

Piloting was conducted prior to starting the data collection for the study in order to test the effectiveness of the research instruments, the interview process, recruitment process for the influencer interviews, and the questions in the interview schedule. The participants for the pilot phase were recruited by the SDS by advertising to a smaller pool of participants, from which three participants volunteered to take part in the study. The sampled participants had connections to the SDS in some way as the advertisement for the piloting phase was not circulated to external channels. Otherwise, the sampling procedure for the piloting phase was similar to the process outlined in section 4.4.1. Participation to the pilot interviews was voluntary and the same procedures for recruitment were in place as for the main recruitment. Ethical considerations for the piloting were the same as for the main recruitment and are outlined in the following section.

Piloting was conducted on 3 young adults in the initial phase, with the intent of recruiting influencers from the young adults' accounts for the study to be interviewed as well. The researcher asked the young adult participant to contact the potential influencer participants and to ask if the researcher could contact them about the research. If the influencer participant agreed, they relayed their contact information to the researcher through the young adult participant. The process for this adjusted during the pilot. Initially, the researcher conducted most of the communications about the influencer participants with the young adult participant via email, but in the later interviews most of the discussions about contacting the influencers was done at the end of the interview with email communication supplementing the initial discussion and the means to relay the contact information. However, possibly due to the pandemic context during the data collection, the influencers that had agreed to be contacted regarding the study did not reply to the contact attempts. This resulted in a change in the sampling process. The participants were still asked if they would be willing to contact the influencers they named as influential in the study and ask them if they would be willing to be reached out by the researcher about participating in the study. However, as this recruitment process for the influencers was found to be unreliable, influencers were recruited for the study directly via similar recruitment methods as the young adults were recruited. The process for the influencer recruitment was detailed in section 4.4.2.

As a result of the piloting process, the semi-structured interviews were found to be a suitable data gathering instrument as the participants responded comfortably to the open-ended questions, but small changes to the interview schedules were made to ensure that the interviews covered the research question themes fully. The changes consisted of adding more prompting questions to the following areas: 1) to elements of the career guidance and information that the young adults received while the young adults were in school. Added a prompt about the careers advisors added in case the young adults' interactions with them did not emerge in the broader initial question and a question about employer visits or career events in school in case the participants did not talk about them freely. 2) additional prompts to discuss the challenges that Covid-19 pandemic posed for the participants. 3) added a specific question to inquire about the attitudes in the young adults' social environments (whether personal or school for example) in order to ensure that this element is covered in the interview if the topic does not emerge as part of the young adults' responses to the broader questions. 4) The final change was some minor adjustments to wording of questions were made to make the questions clearer based on the respondents' clarifying questions during the first two interviews. The findings from the piloting procedure were also resulted in adding further prompts in the influencer interview schedule and the policy expert interview schedule and adjusting the wording in questions that were similar to the ones that the young adults had found unclear or overly complex.

4.7 Ethics

This section outlines the ethical considerations that the study considered, the ethics guidance that the study follows, and the different procedures that the study went through to ensure that it was conducted ethically.

Ethical considerations and guidance

Ethical considerations are important in all social research, but they are in many ways heightened in importance in qualitative research which can delve into sensitive topics in substantial depth and often results in production of information. This is why care was taken in the design to consider the topics that were discussed during the interviews to minimise the risk of sensitive topics being discussed and care has been taken to protect the identities of the participants. This study does not involve any topics considered to be sensitive in the University of Glasgow guidelines, but care will still be taken to address any distress that the research might cause.

This research follows the guidelines set by British Educational Research Association (BERA) in their ethical guidelines to Educational Research (BERA, 2018). As the guidelines suggest, the participants were provided with information about the study to ensure, as much possible, what the topics covered in the interviews were, how the data was going to be used, and what the purpose of the study was among other elements. Similarly, as the BERA guidelines recommend, no compensation was offered to the participants for taking part in the study. Each participant was made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any point and without a need to provide a reason.

The main ethical considerations in this study are to do with confidentiality of identity, where the BERA's guidelines were again taken into consideration. The participants, when possible, were assured that their responses are not identifiable in the final thesis if any quotes from their research interviews are used. To ensure the confidentiality of identity, the data was transcribed solely by the researchers and the data was de-identified. The process of de-identification included replacing any names in the transcripts with pseudonyms and usage broader geographical terms for locations instead of specific names of streets, schools, or small areas. Additionally, the original interview transcripts were deleted after the transcription was finished to reduce the risk of personally identifiable information getting into wrong hands.

Despite the measures of de-identification the risk of identification was emphasised to the policy experts as they belong to a small population where a complete anonymisation may not be possible among the community of experts that they belong to. In order to limit the risk of identifying the participants their roles are not revealed and only a general description of their areas of expertise utilised in this study is provided instead. Before any material and quotes used from the policy expert interviews, or from other participants, the content is evaluated and either processed to avoid identification or the content is not used directly.

Finally, the study is fully compliant with the legal requirements of collection, storage, and use of personal data as set out in the UK by the Data Protection Act of 1998 as well as the GDPR guidelines. The BERA guidelines emphasise this requirement and the data collected as part of the study is stored in secure drives (password protected and encrypted where necessary).

Ethics procedure

The study went through an ethical approval procedure by University of Glasgow's school of Education ethics board. The ethics board reviewed the study proposal and approved it before any data was collected. The study was also been conducted under PhD supervisor monitoring. The materials distributed to the participants contained contact information of the supervisors so that the participants could contact them directly in case they felt uncomfortable with some element of the interview process.

4.8 Reflection of the researcher positionality

Researcher positionality is an important and often discussed feature of qualitative research. This section contains a discussion about my positionality during the research in relation to the different participant groups. The discussion will also include some of the possible effects of this positionality during the data collection phase of the study.

As outlined in the earlier sections and Chapters, the study was set in Scotland and the study sample consisted of Scottish young adults, different influencers in professional roles, and policy experts. I come to the study in some ways from an outsider perspective as I am not Scottish, I have not completed my education in Scotland, nor have worked in careers guidance or teaching prior to this research. Additionally, the role of a researcher creates additional distance to the participants.

However, there are also elements that make me less distant from the participants as a researcher and well positioned to conduct this research. While I am not from Scotland, or indeed from rest of the UK originally, my accent is not located in any distinct geographic location or indicate any distinct socioeconomic status. This does not signal me as belonging to a specific socioeconomic background and I will be more of a 'blank slate' to many participants. Additionally, while I do not come from the UK I had spent more than 7 years in Scotland when the data was collected and was familiar with many of the structures present in the country from literature. I also did not face a language barrier as I had become accustomed to different regional accents present in Scotland. I also shared many common factors with the participants. With the young adults I was of same gender with many of them, I was only a few years older than most participants, and I had gone through a rather complex educational journey myself as outlined in Chapter 1.

As a result, I conducted the study from an outsider position, but not where I was far removed from the issues that were being discussed with the young adults. The outsider positionality is not necessarily a bad thing since both insider and outsider positionalities contain features that

can be beneficial for getting participants' views and bringing the participants' voices into the analysis. Indeed, it is often recognised that being in an outsider position and not necessarily knowing all the intricacies of the cultural setting of the research can result in participants being more exhaustive in their explanations and answers as there is less assumed common knowledge (Merriam et al., 2001). This was especially useful during the interviews with the influencers and the policy experts, as both participant groups went deep into detail about their practice and the Scottish context for educational choices as they did not expect me to have gone through it myself. I could also utilise my outsider positionality to ask further detail in some interview areas, such as the different participants to the CIAG system present in Scotland.

While an outsider researcher might face some issues in navigating some of the social dynamics, establishing a more equal relationship, even initiating a discussion might be more of a challenge (Chavez, 2008), I had already become accustomed to the Scottish setting sufficiently where these elements did not become an issue. It is also not the case that one is necessarily 'inside' or 'outside' for the duration of research (Merriam et al., 2001). Indeed, sometimes positionality is presented in terms where shared features, such as age, gender, ethnic background, socioeconomic status etc., between the researcher and participants result in an immediate rapport. However, that is not given and participants might not immediately accept said similarities due to the power and status difference in the researcher-participant dynamic (Merriam et al., 2001). As such, my positionality was adaptive and even during the relatively brief interviews (around 40 minutes on average) the participants became increasingly open and familiar with me and shared more details about issues discussed earlier on in the interviews.

4.9: Summary of Chapter 4

This section has outlined the framework used in the study, which is based on Critical Realism but combines concepts from earlier research into young adults' educational decision-making into it. I seek to research how young adults conduct reflexive decision-making amidst different contexts with different challenges they face and how they use the different enablements that they might have. This Chapter also outlined the qualitative research design, the sampling process for participants, ethical considerations in the research, and how the study was piloted prior to starting the data collection.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings I: Young Adults' decision-making through their educational journeys into Modern Apprenticeships

5.1 Introduction

This chapter begins the discussion of the study's findings and focuses on the 16 young adult interviews conducted with the apprentices. The data from the other interviews with influencers and experts will be discussed in Chapter 6. This introduction contains the structure of the chapter and outline of the findings.

In Section 5.2, following the introduction, I provide a brief reminder of the analysis and the framework used to discuss the findings. This includes an outline of Archer's three-stage model, (2007, 2012) which provides a theory of how people make choices. Each element of the discussion addresses a part of the model, although the discussion does not necessarily follow the order of the model for structural reasons. The broader discussion of the framework and operationalisation of concepts is found in Chapter 4.

The chapter then moves on to discuss the findings of the study in more detail starting from section 5.3., which begins with an examination of young adults' aspirations and motivations behind the pathway choices the young adults adopted during their journeys. The discussion also covers how the structural factors, such as decision-making context, both enable and constrain the decision-making. The potential structural effects are exerted through the resources which the young adults can access through their social connections and institutional settings. However, factors such as geographic location and labour market conditions are considered as well. The section also discusses how the young adults' aspirations changed over time as the choices made in school did not meet their expectations and the participants adjusted their aspirations to address their concerns.

Section 5.4 consists of a discussion about the young adults' pathway choices and the role that contextual setting appeared to have on the decision to pursue specific pathways. The discussion of findings centres around how the structural factors – such as information, resources, and support present in the different fields (school, home, employment) – influence the subjective impressions that the young adults have about their pathway options into their aspired careers.

In Section 5.5 I examine the transition behaviours (Evans, 2007) of the young adults. The transition behaviours consider a broader set of behaviours that the participants adopted during their decision-making of both the overall pathways to pursue as well as search for available apprenticeship opportunities. The considerations in the discussion include the methods the participants used to find opportunities, influencers they utilised for information and contacts, and the kinds of barriers they faced and addressed during the process.

Section 5.6 consists of a discussion about key moments when the reflexive decision-making was evident in the young adults' accounts about their choices. The examined elements consist of the modes of reflexivity (Archer, 2012; Baker, 2019) and the examination of why certain moments in the young adults' journeys appear to foster reflexive decision-making. The chapter ends with a summary of the findings in section 5.7.

5.2 Process and framework used in analysis

Analysis of the participants' aspirations and decision-making utilises the analytical framework outlined in Chapter 4. The framework draws from the Critical Realism (CR; (Archer, 2012, 2007, 2003), Capabilities approach (CA; McGrath et al. 2020) and the Bourdesian set of conceptual tools (Bourdieu, 1977; Grenfell, 2012). These are used to interrogate the young adults' decision-making process.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the CR approach is suited well to examining the ways in which young adults navigate their journeys through different structural factors and how their reflexive thinking is critical for understanding the choices that the young adults make throughout the decision-making process shown in Figure 5.1. A key concept from CR is the reflexivity of young adults in their decision-making, and to what extent they could exercise their agency. This reflexive decision-making is examined using the concept of reflexive modes, which describes different approaches to reflexive decision-making. The CA is used in examining the aspirations and capabilities of young adults, specifically what they valued (instrumental or intrinsic elements) and whether the aspirations were *for* or *through* education and training. The analysis also considered the conversion factors, such as social resources and other elements outlined in Chapter 4, which helped them translate their capabilities into functionings. This complements the CR approach as the capabilities approach puts emphasis on what the young adults valued and helps interrogate the reflexive decision-making process and the factors that enabled or restricted the young adults' choices.

The discussion is organized in relation to the three-stage model developed by Archer, shown in Figure 5.1 on the next page (Archer, 2012). In each section the first part of the three-stage model is considered, i.e. how structural influences and influencers constrain, enable, or otherwise shape the young adults' decision-making. Section 5.3 explores the subjectively defined concerns (constellations of concerns) and aspirations (personally defined projects) that were motivations behind the young adults' choices.

FIGURE 5.1 : THE THREE-STAGE MODEL (ADAPTED FROM ARCHER, 2007, P.17)

The Three-Stage Model

1. Structural and cultural properties *objectively* shape the situations that agents confront involuntarily, and *inter alia* possess generative powers of constraint and enablement in relation to
2. Subjects' own constellations of concerns, as *subjectively* defined in relation to the three orders of natural reality: nature, practice, and the social.
3. Courses of action are produced through *reflexive deliberations* of subjects who *subjectively* determine their practical projects in relation to their *objective* circumstances.

The Section 5.4 discusses the 'outcomes' of the deliberative process regarding young adults' pathway choices after school and the plans they have for enacting their choice. Thus, this section discusses how the structural properties affect the courses of action of young people so that they can decide on the pathway choice that they subjectively assess is the best fit for them in their circumstances. The broader transition behaviours examined in Section 5.5 – and influencers that play a role in the chosen approaches – are connected to the third stage in the model. Section 5.6 examines the contextual conditions in which the reflexive decision-making described by the three-stage model are most evident, and which forms of reflexivity are evidenced in the young adults' accounts. Therefore, the final section is linked to the first part of the model as well as in the examination of the reflexive modes that were conceptualised by Archer (2012)

The data used in this chapter is from the 16 interviews conducted with young adults who pursued Modern Apprenticeship training. Each young adult was interviewed once. The interview data was transcribed verbatim resulting in 224 of 1.5 spaced pages, which were

coded following the steps outlined Section 4.4 (206 pages of interviews with influencers and policy experts were analysed simultaneously and are discussed in Chapter 6). The first phase of coding focused marking different elements of the conversation, such as school experiences, influencers, and specific forms of information like apprenticeship opportunities. The second phase of coding consisted of identifying elements relevant to the used framework, such as identifying young adults' aspirations, whether the aspirations were *through* or *for* education and training, the contextual circumstances they occupied during their journeys, as well as the identification of different features of the modes of reflexivity. These categorisations were used to analyse the participants' aspirations, pathway choices, transition behaviours, and the role of influencers in the young adults' journeys.

Any quotes used in the thesis that arise from the collected data are attributed to the participants through their pseudonyms. The quotes are verbatim, but some speech elements (such as participants making sounds like "umm…" or "hmm") are cut to make the passages more easily legible.

Table 5.1. Categories and subcategories from the analysis of 16 young adult interviews

Motivations and aspirations in decision-making		
Types of aspirations	***Subcategories of aspirations***	
Intrinsic aspiration	• Personal interest • Personal strength	
Instrumental aspiration	• Career potential • Work opportunities • Useful qualifications • Financial security	
The key decision-making phases in young adults' journeys and the influencers involved in the phases		
Decision-making phase	***Key influencers present in the different journeys***	***Forms of influence in the different journeys***
1st key phase in school context	• Subject teachers • Guidance/pastoral teachers • Career Advisors • Employer representatives	• Information about pathways • Information about careers • Structure and support for executing the pathway choices

		• Experiencing careers
2nd key phase after finishing/attempting a different pathway or after leaving the school context early	• Employer recruiters/representatives • Career advisors • Youth employability support workers • Training providers • Parents • Siblings • Friends & other social connections	• Information about pathways • Information about careers • Support for execution of pathway choices • Hearing about career experiences (1st hand accounts)
Transition behaviours and the modes of reflexivity used in reflexive decision-making		
Phase of transition	***Transition behaviours used*** *(number of participants utilising the approach)*	***Modes of reflexivity used*** *(number of participants utilising the approach)* **Note:** as there was evidence of multiple approaches being used by some people in a single stage, the total is higher than 16
1st key phase in school context	• Strategic (6) • Taking Chances (2) • Step-by-step (6) • Wait and see (2)	• Communicative (8) • Autonomous (8) • Meta-reflexive (6) • Fractured (1)
2nd key phase in post-school context	• Strategic (2) • Taking Chances (5) • Step-by-step (7) • Wait and see (1)	• Communicative (13) • Autonomous (8) • Meta-reflexive (1) • Fractured (0)

5.3 The motivations in young adults' decision-making

In this section I discuss the motivations that the young adults had when they were making their educational decisions. Put into terms in Archer's three stage model, any concerns such as unemployment or lack of qualifications are a part of the constellations of concerns, and aspirations are subjectively defined projects that the young adults seek to fulfil (Archer, 2012). The young adults' choices are made to address the concerns through the personal projects. Both elements contribute to the motivating factors. The motivations were analysed

and categorised into two types: intrinsic motivations and instrumental motivations. The intrinsic considerations consist of personally defined concerns related to personal strengths and preferences that the young people sought to fulfil. This would include factors such as wanting to work in a specific field or a job role because the participant found it fulfilling, and they wanted to achieve a long-term career in that field for that reason. In contrast, instrumental aspirations are ones that serve to advance other goals, rather than being in and of themselves valued by the decision-maker. These elements are also used to assess the modes of reflexivity that the young adults utilised in their decision-making.

The motivations for choices examined in this section relate to the young adults' aspirations as well as contextual factors that acted as drivers the young adults' choices regarding their work and education. Thus, the impact of the structural context on the subjectively defined needs is part of the analysis. The emphasis will be on the decision-making phase that led to the participants choosing to go into MA training, but earlier stages in their educational journeys are also considered in the analysis for those went on to do other pathways before the MA pathway. The evolution of the participants' aspirations and motivations is an important element in understanding what the young adults value in educational choices, i.e., is it predominantly qualifications or skills, or something else. Additionally, examining the young adults' aspirations through the capabilities approach whether it is valued intrinsically or instrumentally, furthering our understanding for why the young adults might be pursuing certain educational pathway options.

The motivations of the young adults are examined through participants' aims and wants in the different phases of their decision-making. I also investigated to what extent their aspirations were driven by their intrinsic preferences, instrumental considerations, and how economic or other structural constraints affected the aspiration patterns. The theoretical concepts utilised in the section revolve around capabilities (Aldinucci et al., 2021; McGrath et al., 2020; Polesel et al., 2018), reflexivity and its modalities (Archer, 2012, 2007; Baker, 2019), the Bourdesian capitals (social, cultural, economic) held and embodied by the participants (Atkinson, 2010a; Polesel et al., 2018), and the manifestation of those capitals in the young adults' understanding of dominant discourses (doxa) that forms the participants' social reality.

In the accounts of their journeys, all participants in the study had some goals and aims that they sought to fulfil when making their educational decisions and each participants had personal preferences that they sought to fulfil while meeting those goals. The intrinsic

aspirations were centred around finding an enjoyable or fulfilling career or training for themselves. In contrast, the instrumental aspirations focused on the utility value of the option. These aspirations are shown in table 5.2 below, and participants are divided into two groups, based on which form of training they pursued first after leaving school.

Table 5.2: Concerns and aspirations the young adults sought to fulfil through MA training

Categories of aspirations *and parts constituting them*	**Number of participants**	**From apprenticeship group**	**From college and university group**
Intrinsic aspirations (Section 5.3.1)	**7**	**3**	**4**
Personal interest	6	2	3
Personal strength	1	1	
Instrumental aspirations (Section 5.3.2)	**9**	**3**	**6**
Career potential	2		2
Work opportunities	5	1	4
Useful qualification	1	1	
Financial security	1	1	

5.3.1 Intrinsic aspirations: "it is part of my passion. I love it"

The discussion for intrinsic motivations the participants had in the study are divided into aspirations *for* and aspirations *through* the education and training formats that they sought at different stages of their educational journeys. The approach has been drawn from migration studies (Carling and Collins, 2018) and has recently been utilised to examine young adults' aspirations *for* and *through* the forms of education and training by Aldinucci and colleagues (2021). The discussion begins with an examination of intrinsic aspirations *for* education and training, which in the study was found to apply for MA training.

Intrinsic aspirations for education and training

Five participants demonstrated intrinsic aspirations for education and training in the sample, but they were short-term aspirations for training that would fulfil their long-term aspirations *through* education. These participants thus preferred a form of education and training because

they felt they would find it fulfilling, and it would help them grow both personally or professionally through accrual of valuable experience and skills.

Participants who intrinsically aspired for MA training wanted to usually pursue it due to the work-based learning element of the MA. This contrasts with the 'book learning' they associated with university and college options. The preference was expressed as a dislike of 'book learning' or feeling that they are not good at studying.

> *"I think university is a good place to be. I just don't feel like I like it because… for example I'm not really good revising or studying. I'm not really that type of person." – Henry*

The expressed disinterest and lack of belief in one's own success in university and college pathways stemmed from the way teaching is organised in those forms of further education. This incentivised the participants towards work-based learning options, and specifically MA. One participant developed this preference in school, all the while feeling that he was pushed towards college and university education. Others developed the preference for work-based learning after experiencing full-time work after school, or after negative study experiences in college and university.

After the negative experiences, the participants' understanding of their strengths and preferences changed, which appears to have resulted in re-assessment of their ability and desire to go through the college and university pathways. Thus, the participants appear to have adjusted their aspirations for education and training. They intrinsically did not want to pursue university or college even when they acknowledged the benefits of the pathways. The accounts of the young adults suggest that aspirations are adjusted both unconsciously and framed as personal preferences (Elster, 2015), as well as being rationalised (Hart, 2016, 2012). The rationalisation occurs via perceived embodied functionings after assessing if one is capable of pursuing HE or college training. The fuctionings were be extrapolated from one's academic success while in school, college or university in the young adults' accounts. The reasons for wanting to pursue a form of training that involved more doing rather than reading were thus both framed as a form of preference stemming from lack of enjoyment and success in the academic environments, which the young adults experienced in school, college, or university.

For the participants who attempted to pursue college and university, but did not finish their course programmes, the shift in aspirations for education and training involving work-based

learning was rationalised based on their experiences of university or college and how they performed in those learning environments. Those young adults who did not finish their college or university education did not appear to have strong aspirations for those pathways in their accounts when they made the choice to pursue them in school. Instead, the options were perceived as the default options for them in their pursuit of their aspirations *through* education and learning. However, after negative experiences in academic learning environments, they developed aspirations *for* a mode of learning that they felt was more suitable for them.

Intrinsic aspirations through education and training

Five of the sixteen participants were predominantly motivated by intrinsic motivations *through* education in their decision-making (2 from apprenticeships group, 3 from college and university group) when they applied to their MA training. However, none of the participants were solely motivated by either instrumental or personal preference reasons and other participants had intrinsic motivations that they sought to fulfil as part of the decision-making process. Likewise, instrumental aspirations were present for the participants in their short-term aspirations for education and training when the aspirations through education were predominantly intrinsic.

For the five participants, the intrinsic goals through education and training were centred around finding an enjoyable career where the young adults would thrive, develop, and enjoy working. The perceived instrumental opportunities, such as financial advancement were not the key aspirations in the accounts, although the participants did sometimes seek to pick an option with the most instrumental potential from the careers that fulfilled their intrinsic aspirations. Those participants with strong aspirations *through* education and training saw pathway choices as means to reach their preferred professions. The intrinsic preferences were expressed via *wants* of some feature of a work that the participants felt they needed to feel fulfilled in the career. The desire for a fulfilling career is also associated with the use of the meta-reflexive mode of reflexivity (Archer, 2012, 2007)

> *I've always wanted to be a nursery teacher. It is part of my passion. I love it.*
> *– Eliza*

The sample contained variability in terms of when the aspiration towards a career in a field was formed. The person who developed their aspirations earliest was Eliza, who developed a clear preference for what she wanted to do from elementary school onwards after she took part in taking care of her nephew and younger children in school. The aspiration was

developed over years at home and was strengthened at school during volunteering opportunities in local nurseries. This resulted in her considering only one option for herself as a career. Likewise, she had firmly decided on a route to that career after experiencing nursery work first-hand. It is important to note that Eliza did not have any non-negotiable barriers that prevented her from pursuing her preference. She had the opportunity to develop the required competencies and skills during volunteering, which made her confident in her capability to pursue the career. Likewise, she had the required social, material, and cultural resources to navigate the process of reaching her targeted field. These resources are discussed further in section 5.5 where the young adults' strategies to reach their aspirations are discussed. Others developed their aspirations to work for a specific field much later than Eliza. An example of this is William, who did not know what he wanted to do while in school and subsequently chose to work in a job that he did not want to pursue as a career while he tried to ascertain what he wanted to do. Preferences were then formed over the course of his journey after experiencing different jobs and education pathways.

Intrinsic aspirations were also framed in terms of feeling comfortable in a career, rather than necessarily having a singular passion for a specific field. In these instances, the aspirations were formed later in the decision-making process and were formulated after experiencing different kinds of jobs that did not meet the still hard to articulate preferences at the time. Experiences of various jobs – usually revolving around customer service – made the young adults value doing something that they wanted to do in the long-term and progress, rather than doing something to just "get by".

> *"I realized that just taking short time jobs … wasn't going to where I wanted to be. So, I started to look at what I wanted to do" – Hazel*

The accounts of the young adults also showed that intrinsic aspirations through education and training could sometimes be formed late in school, after the young adults had already formed plans for their post-school transitions. Sometimes the preferences formed after they had already started on a pathway they had chosen earlier. This means that plans had to be adjusted when aspirations changed. The adjustments were made by the participants regardless of whether they had started their pathway or not. This pattern of late aspiration formation and change of plans was present in participant accounts where the Covid pandemic had caused disruptions to the participants' schooling. One of those participants – Louise – had applied to different college courses, trying to pick areas she thought she would enjoy but without having a clear career she aspired for. Louise was one of the young adults in Scotland who's

schooling practically ended in March of 2020 and utilised the time to reflect on her post-school plans. She decided to try and find opportunities field that she had become interested just before her schooling finished, which was business. The pandemic disruption provided an opportunity to examine the available opportunities in her new field of interest. As a result she began aspiring to work in the field of business instead of her earlier choices she formed while in school.

> *I knew business was actually – I really liked learning about it. ... It was really just what I wanted to do. – Louise*

For other participants who were affected by the pandemic, the disruption also resulted in them examining their earlier choices and their aspirations, but the shift was towards including more instrumental considerations into the decision-making. The findings suggest that the participants who had intrinsic aspirations at the forefront in their decision-making were in situations where they had sufficient social, cultural, and economic capital resources to feel capable of navigating any challenges or barriers in their way. As discussed further in the next section, the intrinsic aspirations formed early on in school were something that they young adults did genuinely aspire towards, but they were aspiring to the idea of a career in a field, rather than necessarily the reality, which is when they faced structural challenges that resulted in them changing their aspirations and strategies.

5.3.2 Instrumental aspirations "I don't want a dead-end job"

This section examines the instrumental aspirations shaping the young adults's educational decision-making. The instrumental aspirations refer to goals and hopes which the young adults pursued for instrumental reasons i.e., something pursued for the benefits it provides towards other goals and aspirations. The discussion is divided into sections about aspirations *for* and *through* education and training.

Instrumental aspirations for education and training

Instrumental aspirations were the most common aspirations for education and training. They were present in all 16 participant accounts to some extent, and these aspirations were focused on the short-term. The primary aspiration *for* education and training was that it provided the participants with both the skills going forward but also the symbolic capital (qualifications) that they could use to pursue careers in their desired fields. What follows is the discussion of

the categories within the aspirations *for* education and training, which are: Qualifications, economic self-sufficiency and debt aversion, and work-experience.

Qualifications

Qualifications were fundamental in the young adults' aspirations *for* education and training. They were seen to enable the pursuit of careers in fields *through* education. The participants in the college and university group all pursued HE or college pathways when they were in school because they had an understanding that those pathways provided them with a route to good careers.

> "I thought that is like what you need to do. You just need to do that, then go to uni [university] and then go for your career." – Hazel

As will be discussed in more detail in section 5.5, the formation of the aspiration *for* university and college for instrumental reasons was influenced by the different influencers in the young adults' school and home environments. The qualifications were also an instrumental aspiration for those who sought MA training. This pattern was present in accounts where the young adults did not have further qualifications after school, or if they were wishing to change a field of work. In those contexts, the participants sought to pursue education and training that provided a useful qualification rather than just seeking to find a different job from the one that they were doing at the time. Therefore, the qualifications element was what made MAs especially interesting compared to full-time work that did not lead to further qualifications.

Economic self-sufficiency and debt aversion

Another instrumental aspiration for education and training was the ability to have an income during education and training. As discussed in Chapter 3, the Scottish approach to funding HE education and training via SAAS eliminates the need to find enough money for tuition fees and financial considerations are generally limited to covering living costs during education. Thus, debt aversion was not a factor in the accounts, except in one instance where they were not eligible for the SAAS support. However, the young adults were conscious of the costs of the different options available to them, especially costs like housing in a different city were seen as a barrier that required negotiating around it, and as such options requiring one to move were generally less attractive. The costs were then weighed against the expected returns from doing it, as Rational Choice approaches would suggest the decision-making occurs (Goldthorpe, 1998). This explicit cost-benefit analysis was present when the

participants were assessing the MA option. However, it was rarely the primary motivation for the participants.

> *"being able to earn money as well as learning at the same time. Yeah… I would say earning money and learning is probably the biggest one [motivations to pursue MA training]." – Rachel*

The need to either have an income during studies or having saved up before studies was a frequent way of framing the cost-benefit assessment for the participants. The consideration of having an income while gaining further qualifications was especially prevalent among those that had worked full-time before considering further study. In these instances, the participants sought to find forms of training where they could combine income and the ability to gain the required qualifications to pursue their career aspirations in their preferred field.

Work experience

The final reason for the aspiration *for* MA training in the sample was the possibility to establish oneself in the field-of-work and gain work experience. This was perceived to be important for future career development, especially for finding job opportunities in the future. Work experience was a common consideration in the sample, with nine participants expressing it as one of their motivations for seeking MA training. Some participants had it as a key consideration in the decision-making process already in school, such as George, but for most the consideration rose in prominence after they had tried to pursue other options first. The work experience consideration was one of the key elements that distinguished MAs from other forms of training, alongside the ability to have income while working. Indeed, the MAs are presented as the option combining these elements to the young adults (Scottish Government, 2014a), so the prevalence of the motivation is understandable in the accounts.

Instrumental aspirations through education and training

The participants' aspirations *through* education and training often contained instrumental aspirations. Eleven participants had an instrumental aspiration as the predominant *through* aspiration at the time they were seeking MA training. However, there were in no instances where the participants' aspirations were purely instrumental. Instead, their career aspirations contained work enjoyability as a factor their decision-making. Thus, and the participants sought to find the most enjoyable option for themselves in the context they occupied. However, the intrinsic aspirations related to enjoying the career for its own sake were not

driving the career aspirations for those eleven participants. Instead, the intrinsic preferences were something that had to be sufficiently satisfied by the instrumentally appealing options.

The emphasis for participants with instrumental key aspirations *through* education and training centred on ensuring work opportunities in the future, career progression potential, and financial security in the medium term. As will be discussed in this section, the participants with instrumental aspirations through education were situated in contexts where they had stopped their pursuit of their initial career aspirations – which were often chosen based on intrinsic preference – and as a result found themselves looking for new direction while working jobs that were in some way precarious. The precariousness manifested in different ways. The participants either experienced lack of work in their initial field of choice, the work they were doing did not have career progression potential, they experienced unstable work hours and income, or they could not be confident that they would be able to stay in the job in the long term.

The discussion covers three key aspirations *though* education and training identified in the analysis, which are: career potential, work security/stability, and work opportunities/variety. The contexts in which these became prominent drivers for decision-making are considered in the discussion.

Career potential

Career potential was a common instrumental consideration in the participants' accounts. For two participants it was one of the key considerations, but it was present in almost every account as one of the considerations. This was the case especially in the second key decision-making phase after the young adults had left school. Career potential was a key element in their broader aspirations for achieving a good career. Career potential refers to potential for career progress and possibility to reach positions with more responsibility. This was an important concern especially for participants who had worked after school but felt that the work they had been doing did not have avenues for progressing further. This was common for participants who had worked in retail.

Charlotte's journey is a good example of a shift in aspirations from intrinsic aspirations through education towards instrumental aspirations due to career concerns. She had sought a job in a field that she enjoyed and after successfully gaining her qualifications from college she worked in her aspired field. However, she found that she did not have enough work and

ended up working a second job in a bar as well. This prompted her to look for opportunities to get into a field where she could establish a career.

> *"I need to actually settle down and find a job that I can stay in and progress in. … although what I'm working in right now is not my dream job, but like is there really such a thing like a dream job? Is it ever going to feel like a dream job?" – Charlotte*

In addition to Charlotte, four more participants had personal interests present more prominently in school than after attempting college or university. Charlotte's journey demonstrates this shift most clearly, as she reached her aspired field of work but began considering another field after facing challenges in finding work. As she found herself in precarious employment context she began to reflect on her condition, priorities, and options going forward. Charlotte's priority shifted from finding a 'dream job' to finding a job with career potential that was sufficiently enjoyable in the long-term. The structural context, namely the labour market conditions Charlotte faced, were important in posing challenges that Charlotte felt she could not negotiate without changing careers. The structural challenges faced by the participants appeared to make instrumental concerns more central in the decision-making.

However, the career potential aspiration was also present as a driver for participants who did not face precarious employment and who were formulating their aspirations in school. The participants who did not have a job that they found intrinsically interesting instead aspired for a job with a good career potential, which would potentially enable them to fulfil any potential future aspirations.

Work security/stability

Work security and stability concern was often paired with the career potential concern in the overall aspiration of achieving a good career. It was also present as a concern in the accounts of participants who had worked precarious jobs. Unlike career potential consideration, work stability was not present in the participants' aspirations when they had not experienced precarious work contexts.

The aspiration for a secure job led to participants valuing employers they trusted to provide stable employment in the long-term, such as public sector employers. William's journey is a good example of this. His aspiration was not for a specific type of job, but to work in the public sector for personal value and work stability reasons. The specific jobs he sought to do

in the public sector were directed by his qualifications, i.e. his achieved functionings, as he felt confident that he would be able to find employment in such roles and was capable of doing it. His desire to pursue work in public sector and achieve stable work was strengthened after working for agencies with uncertain hours. However, he also came from a family where his mother had worked a long career in the public sector, which is where he developed his impression regarding the job stability and thus targeted the sector with that perception in mind.

> *"I always did want to work in the public sector… [they were] telling me obviously how beneficial it is, how stable it is as employment. … So admin was just the obvious route in terms of what my qualifications would allow me to do." – William*

The motivation to find stable work when in a precarious context has also been found in prior studies. A good example is a study by Hardgrove and colleagues, which found that young adults' choices were informed by their present contexts of precarity (Hardgrove et al., 2015). This resulted in subsequent choices being informed by an understanding of the precarious labour market and the diminished presence of intrinsic concerns like desirability of a work role in favour of stability and opportunities to develop in the long-term.

Work opportunities/variety

The number of work opportunities and potential variety was one of the most prominent aspirations across the whole sample of participants. It especially informed the field choice for their careers. For five participants this was the most prominent consideration in their decision-making.

Aspiration to work in a field with varied job opportunities was expressed through two different concerns in the sample. The first one was related to job security. Participants felt that if they gained qualifications for a field or a position with good job opportunities, they would not have trouble finding work if they ever lost their job. The second reason to aspire especially for variety as well as abundance of job opportunities was related to the potential for finding an interesting role in the long-term. Even if the participants did not know what they wanted to do at that point in their journeys – or felt that they were not able to pursue jobs that they enjoyed doing – they aspired for a career in a field with variety job roles to maximise the chances of finding something that they found enjoyable. This was expressed

well by Henry, who was deciding between two different fields of work to pursue. The first was related to sport, which he had enjoyed for a long time. The second was in business administration, where he felt the career potential and variety were superior.

> *"I tried to do a sport and fitness college, I just enjoy it. … Sport route, you know, how many opportunities can you get? … Whereas admin, you have loads of other opportunities. … you have to think what kinds of careers, what kinds of working environment is going to progress in 5 to 10 years' time." – Henry*

The potential for intrinsically appealing work was thus built into the aspiration for a career with varied job opportunities, even as the issue was framed via instrumental considerations. Many participants who were not aspiring to work in a specific career for intrinsic reasons appeared to include scope for finding something that they enjoyed doing in the long-term. However, the instrumental considerations for ensuring long-term stability and career potential were the primary concerns. The pursuit of specific enjoyable role was a consideration that was to be satisfied after the instrumental concerns. This aspiration was common for those that were pursuing business and administration as a field.

Finally, some participants also referred to intrinsic aspirations that they hoped to achieve via their instrumental aspiration to achieve a good career. For example, Zoe's reflections on being able to build a career with steady income was one of her life goals, but her goal was not to make money per se. Instead, she wanted to establish a sufficient economic basis to be able to live independently from her parents. This aspiration demonstrates the difficulty in separating aspirations neatly into intrinsic and instrumental, as there are often intertwined elements. However, her aspiration for building the capability to live independently is an aspiration *through* work in addition to education. Most other participants did not articulate broader life aspirations in their accounts beyond achieving stability and potential for doing something that they enjoyed.

5.3.3 Changes in aspirations over the journeys "That's when I really started to think 'You know what, what kind of things am I good at?'"

Eight participants in the sample (six from the college and university group and two from the apprenticeship group) changed their field of work aspirations over the course of their journeys from school to their MA training.

For two participants the change occurred during the start of the Covid pandemic. The two participants had made choices to pursue specific fields while in school, but the Covid pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns in the UK caused their schooling to finish early. One of the two had planned on going to college but was prevented from getting the required grades when the final exams were not run. The second participant had a college placement as a backup but began pursuing a new field when the disruption provided by the pandemic opened a window of opportunity. Thus, while the Covid pandemic was a substantial barrier for many as it reduced the amount of opportunities available, it could also provide a moment where people could reflect on their choices and how to move forward.

Out of the eight participants that changed their targeted field, seven were pursuing the initial choice for intrinsic reasons. The exception to this was John, whose initial targeted field was predominantly chosen due to potential work that was already waiting for him if he got the qualifications he needed.

The change in aspirations was partially triggered from stopping the initial educational pathway pursuit. However, it was not the only reason. The change in aspirations could also be seen after experiencing precarious work. Participants who did not finish their studies when pursuing college or university education often found themselves doing different jobs that they themselves characterised as 'dead end jobs'. After experiencing this precarious context, they started prioritising career potential in their decision-making more than before, as well as finding a mode of training that they thought was a better fit for themselves.

The participants' accounts suggested that even though their decision-making was not solely motivated by what they found find intrinsically interesting, the work had to be sufficiently enjoyable and suitable to the young adults. If this was not satisfied, they left the job or training and sought other opportunities. This occurred even when they were not motivated by intrinsic interest in the field when they initially pursued the opportunity. Kate articulated this well when discussing her experiences finding work and training before her current job.

> "if I don't like something, I'm not going to do it. Simple as that. So that's why I've been in and out of loads and loads of jobs. Because I thought "I don't like this, so I'm not going to do it. I'm not going to stay in a job that I don't like." – Kate

This suggests the factors that are economic or instrumental in nature are not necessarily sufficient in educational decision-making even in instances where they are most prominent

considerations. The match between the work or study and the personal preferences regarding the topic or tasks must be present or the mid-to-long term feasibility of the field and pathway choices are potentially at risk.

5.3.4 Formation of aspirations and the role that influencers had in supporting their development "she knew what my skills are, and she kind of helped me, pushed me towards that bit"

The participants' accounts suggested that influencers influenced the pathway choices and transition behaviours of the young adults. But the findings also suggest that influencers affected choices regarding field of work. The effects of influencers, especially family members, have been examined in earlier studies, where parents created expectations and played a part in forming the 'default', given assumptions for quality of life and types of careers the young adults should pursue (Atkinson, 2010a; Polesel et al., 2018). The findings of this study provide further evidence regarding the effects that parents can have on aspirations, suggesting varied ways through which parents can exert their influence.

The institutional influencers in the accounts of the young adult participants were found to explicitly push the participants towards a specific field of work in only one instance. Marc's parents were actively seeking to persuade him to pursue a job in a specific field at least temporarily. The influencers' arguments were centred around gaining useful qualifications, work experience, and money, before potentially pursuing another field in future. Marc was persuaded by this and sought work away from his aspired field of work to better prepare himself for future in his preferred field. The reason he chose not to pursue his preferred field immediately was predominantly due to instrumental considerations, such as low starting pay in the field. The way Marc's parents took part in the reflexive assessment of options is a good example of the *communicative reflexives* modality of reflexivity (Archer, 2012, 2007, 2003). The effectiveness of communicative reflexive requires Marc to trust in the advice he received from his parents. The reasons that persuaded him to pursue the option also reflect the social expectations Marc had regarding his future as he came from a family where both parents had achieved professional careers through the university pathway.

What sets Marc's parents apart from other instances of personal influencers contributing to the participants' reflexive process is the introduction of a field of work that the young adult had not considered themselves before the influencer suggested it. The influencers did not insist that Marc makes this his career in future. However, the aim appears to have been to secure Marc's short- to mid-term future with job experience and qualifications in a field that

the parents were familiar with. Both parents were also familiar with the public sector employer they were steering Marc towards. This shows the differences in how influencers seek to exert their influence on young adults and how the approaches of the influencers themselves as agents matters. If parental influences are considered in a more passive way, where the young adults just become influenced by parents equally, this difference would not exist. It is also worth noting that the professional background of Marc's parents suggests them to be "middle class" socioeconomically. This reflects findings from Reay and Ball (1998) study where middle class parents were found to be more strategic and controlling of their children's journeys. However, other participants with parents from similar backgrounds did not appear to exert such behaviour.

Personal influencers were also important when the participants did not know what field to pursue after their earlier pathway attempts were unsuccessful. In these instances, four participants actively modelled their field choices after one or both of their parents and used the parents as sources of information for their questions about the field. William, for example, started to consider what his parents did. He looked especially at what his mother did and thought that a similar career might suit him as well. He began discussing his options for future with his parents when he was in a precarious employment situation and without a direction to pursue. Much like Marc, William also demonstrates the communicative reflexive form of reflexivity, which was prominent in the context where the young adults were not sure what direction to pursue. It appears that in his precarious context the information about the parents' employment became more relevant and appealing as they learned more about the parents' work roles and the possibilities in their field of work.

In these contexts, the parental positions were higher socioeconomically than the participants' positions were at the time, so the behaviour to model after the parents served the function of staying at least steadily in a similar socioeconomic standing as the parents. This is the context when Archer found participants utilising communicative reflexive in her own studies (Archer, 2012). Interestingly no-one in the sample modelled their career aspirations after their parents or sought a job in similar field when they were making their first career choices in school. However, some participants did seek HE because their parents and siblings had done that in the past and the doxa understanding in their field was that the HE is a good choice.

While the institutional influencers in schools did not seek to explicitly steer the young adults towards specific fields, the school environment did contain many different influences that sought to inform and steer the young adults towards some options. This occurred via the

mechanisms of subject choices, support offered to pupils in their transition to post-school placements, and the prominence of HE and college as options in the narratives of success in schools. The effects of the prominence of HE and college in schools are discussed further in section 5.4.

The subject choice structure, while not being directly associated to any specific influencer in the minds of the participants, appears to have been an influential part of the information environment that the participants occupied in school. These subject choices were explicitly framed as not only having impact in the young adults' schooling, but also on the options that they would have for subsequent career choices.

The subject choice structure appears to have directed the young adults towards specific career options without them necessarily thinking about it. This appears to have happened through formation of functionings and internalised sense of capability towards specific fields of work, as William's account outlined earlier suggested. This structure also provides another structural constraint that the young adults faced when forming their career aspirations. The availability of subjects in school can limit how confidently young adults pursue their fields of interest. For example, Marc reflected how he did not have home economics as an option in school when being interested in baker career and was planning a longer progression route to the field because of it, since he would have to get more qualifications and skills in college due to not being able to develop them in school.

Another influencing element in school that ties specifically to teachers as influencers is their role in making a school subject enjoyable, and thus something that the young adults are more likely to pursue in the future. George expressed this well, since one of the reasons he enjoyed business was that he had great teachers. In this way teachers can contribute in young adults forming interests towards specific subjects and types of work by making the subject interesting and enjoyable, which can guide career choices.

> *…it [business as a subject] was the one I really liked. It was generally just the teachers I had in high school who were very influential to myself … I think they were always keen to help me. – George*

The school environment did have visiting influencers that did seek to promote specific fields of work to the young adults. Additionally, the school staff also directed young adults towards events where they would receive such influence. In the sample, the clearest case for this was for Fran, who began aspiring for a career in a field after meeting with a recruiter for a

company in a career's fair. This suggests that the partnership activities and other structures connecting different institutional actors together can influence young adults' aspirations and transition behaviours, as will be discussed further in section 5.5 and Chapter 6.

Finally, work experience placements were a structural feature in school that appeared to influence the young adults' career aspirations. Marc's intrinsic aspiration for a career in baking stemmed from experiencing the field first-hand during a work experience placement. Similarly, Colin also formed a career aspiration after a work experience placement, although his aspirations towards the field were instrumental and employability related rather than intrinsic. While schools and local authorities are responsible for organizing placements (Education Scotland, 2015b) the participants could have personal connections in the placements like Colin did. Additionally, even in school organized placement they have different influencers present in the placements that are exerting influence, resulting in potentially different experiences. The institutional structural arrangements which enable these are further discussed in Chapter 6.

5.4 Young adults' pathway choices and the key role of information providing influencers

This section discusses the participants' pathway choices, which were pursued to realise the aspirations discussed in the previous section. The discussion centres around the sources of information the young adults utilised in their decision-making in school – and all the influencers and resources forming that field – as well as in the subsequent decision-making phase outside the school context. The different contexts form the broader field that the young adults habited when making choices and the discussion examines how the young adults considered different pathways for themselves as they sought to realise their personal projects (2007; 2012). The analysis also examines the role that the influencers had in the pathway choices, especially through the information they provided. This includes their role as actors reinforcing young adults' perceptions about the available pathways.

The section first examines the decision-making regarding pathway choices in school and immediately after the school context. Participants who went to MA training as the first qualification resulting training made their choices in the school context. As such, school is a key context in seeking to understand why some young adults chose the apprenticeship pathway while still in school, whereas others only began considering it later. The differences

in especially the impressions of apprenticeship formed in school are examined between participants that chose MA training instead of the other pathways after school.

The second section examines the decision-making of the participants after they had left their educational context. The key theoretical concepts are the same as in section 5.4, but the concept of 'hot', 'cold', and 'warm' information (Ball and Vincent, 1998; Slack et al., 2014) and its usage in decision-making is used to examine the roles that the influencers had in shaping the young adults' strategic choices and perceptions of the options available to them.

5.4.1 Pathway choices in school environment "a lot of things were told to us but personally I just did not have a clue about what I want to do"

The Majority of the participants (13 out of 16) decided on a pathway to pursue after school while they were still in school. The remaining three participants, who all went to work after school for at least a period of a couple of months, had ideas on what they wanted to do but had not fully decided on a direction. Only one participant in the sample executed a transition into MA training while in school. This means that 5 of the 6 participants who pursued MA training as the first qualification resulting training made the choice to pursue MA training after they had left the school environment. For all other participants, the pathway choice involved pursuing college or university pathways.

Three of the six participants made their choices after their initial strategies were disrupted by the Covid pandemic. One participant had to readjust as the Covid pandemic disrupted the spring exams in school, which meant that she did not get the grades that she needed to confirm her provisional college offer. This proved to be a non-negotiable constraint and she could not pursue her college option any longer, resulting in a re-adjustment and reflection on the next steps. For the other two, the early ending of the school year provided space to reassess their aspirations as outlined in the previous section, but they did not face similar non-negotiable constraints. In school, these participants were aspiring to work in a field that would be a good fit for them personally – indicating elements of meta-reflexivity usage in their field choice – and pursued those options with 'default' pathway options in their minds, which were college or university.

Those who chose to pursue MA training after school did so with a mix of intrinsic and instrumental aspirations, as mentioned in the previous section, and these reflected the utilisation of predominantly meta-reflexivity and autonomous reflexivity in their pathway and field choices. Three of the six reflected predominantly on the personal fit of the mode of

training for themselves, reflected in their intrinsic aspirations for education and training. For the other three the choice was made based on instrumental rationality, i.e., what option was most beneficial instrumentally and associated with autonomous reflexivity. These participants did not necessarily have a strong preference for the work-based learning that is part of the apprenticeship training, or they would not have preferred apprenticeship training if not for the practical considerations listed above. This suggests that the appeal of the MA route depended on the context and aspirations of the young adults. However, many of the participants did not consider MAs while in school, which leads us to ask why that was the case.

The pathway choices made in school were strongly influenced by the institutional influencers. One key reason for this appears to be the participants' reliance on the influencers' expertise in the school environment as trusted sources of information. The Careers Information Advice and Guidance (CIAG) structure is one of the key elements guiding the provision of career information in Scottish schools. As part of CIAG teachers and career advisors are tasked to support the young adults' educational decision-making (Scottish Government, 2020). Indeed, the pathway choices of the participants were influenced both directly and indirectly by the guidance provided by both guidance/pastoral teachers (different names used for the same role in Scottish schools), career advisors, as well as other less consistently present influencers like visiting employers.

The influencers (specifically guidance teachers and career advisors) were tasked to try to ensure that the participants had a destination to go to after finishing with school. The most prominent form of influence was information about how the young adults could reach the career fields that they were interested in, as well as guidance and practical support on enacting their choices. Both the information and the support were provided through formalised class-based activities as well as through one-to-one sessions with the influencers. The approach in isolation does not explain why almost all young adults in the sample were pursuing college and university education after school despite later seeking MA training.

The practical execution of the support begins to give us an insight Into why the participants might not have pursued MA training while in school. One key reason for this appeared to be the uneven attention paid to the pathway options. The accounts of the young adults recounted that applications for colleges and universities were supported as part of class activities while in school, while apprenticeships did not receive such universal attention.

"See to be honest with you, there wasn't really enough information about the kinds of things [apprenticeship options], so it was. You know, it was more focused on the college and university kind of aspect of it. Apprenticeships you would say "oh go and speak to the careers advisor"" – Henry

In addition to having the college and university options presented more prominently, some of the participants' accounts suggested that the information presented to them shaped their attitudes towards the pathway options. The information that was presented, and the way it was presented by teachers and visitors in schools, contributed to negative perception of apprenticeships for some of the participants. This included the formation of an image that MAs are for those that do not do well in school, or as two young women in the group reflected, that they are predominantly for boys.

These perceptions of apprenticeships were formed for the participants through two mechanisms in the accounts. The first way was the impression formation stemming from the types of employers that were visiting the schools to advertise apprenticeships, which were mostly from fields in manual labour jobs and where males were a large majority. This was reflected in most participant accounts as they recalled how apprenticeships were present in school. The second way was through the proportion of attention allocated to apprenticeships in careers-related activities, which was less than for other options. Combined, these two factors reinforced the perception of apprenticeships as a less valuable option, or one that was not suited to themselves.

Apprenticeships also had the smallest representation (compared to university and college options) in school career events in the accounts of the participants. Additionally, visiting employer representatives in schools, who talked about journeys to employment in fields that were not traditionally associated with the apprenticeship training, were primarily outlining college and university routes to work in their field. When apprenticeship routes to work were discussed, they involved the 'traditional' apprenticeship fields – such as construction, plumbing, and childcare. Finally, the schools also reserved specific times to guide whole classes of students into universities and colleges, but there were no similar activities allocated for apprenticeships in the accounts of the participants.

These factors were the most common contributors to negative impressions of apprenticeships in the sample. As a result of the representation of the MA option, the participants did not feel that the option was for them, and most did not feel that it was a good way to enter fields such

as business. The perception of bad fit of MA training (and apprenticeships generally) to their personal aspirations was especially prominent among the young adults who did well in school.

The negative impression of the apprenticeships was strong enough for the majority of the participants at this stage of their journeys that they did not even consider apprenticeships as a possible option for themselves.

The choice to pursue college or university in school was found to be influenced by the dominant discourses from the different institutional influencers in school (teachers, careers advisors) and the institutional influencers visiting school (company recruiters or employees discussing their work). In prior studies the findings about young adults' trust in information regarding universities from 'official' sources of information ('cold knowledge') was lower than 1st or 2nd hand information they received directly from their social networks ('hot knowledge') or from casual meetings with perceived peers ('warm knowledge'; Ball and Vincent 1998; Slack et al. 2014). The findings of this study support those earlier findings in many ways. Several participants reflected on feeling that the university was the option to strive for, including those who pursued college and apprenticeship opportunities immediately after school.

> *When you're in school it's kind of ingrained in your brain like you have to go into university. – Hazel*

This impression was formed from a mixture of official information from the school, from career advisors, visiting employers, and from informal information presented in school coupled with a mutual reinforcement from peers. The reinforcement occurred both through discussions and through the choices that the peers made. The perception was sometimes so ingrained and accepted, that some participants felt that they had passively followed the route rather than spending time weighing the benefits of the different options. This appears to have resulted in a limited reflection on the issue in some instances, as the solution to it was seen to be obvious.

> *I didn't really think much about what I was going to do after school… kind of… just kind of followed the conveyor belt and people go to uni [university] – John*

The visitors from the companies discussing their work appears to have been perceived more as a 'warm' knowledge rather than 'cold' knowledge, especially when the representatives

discussed their own career journeys. This was the case despite the information coming from an 'institutional' actor whose task in the visits would be to convince the young adults that the company is a good employer. In the Slack et al (2014) study, the mistrust for 'cold' information was found to stem from the belief that the information from universities might be manipulated for promotion purposes and to make the universities look better for applicants. The representatives from employers – as well as career advisors and teachers in some participant accounts – in their 'third party' position and not being directly affiliated with universities appear to have been viewed as more trustworthy sources of information for the pathway choice. The interest into those accounts was present even when they are not peers or in positions that were identified as sources of 'warm' information in those earlier studies. This suggests that official sources of information are not necessarily 'cold' in the context of pathway choice, especially when they discuss their personal journeys. As the young adults saw only college and university pathway examples from employers to fields that they were interested in, they began to focus on those pathways as routes to successful careers. As apprenticeships were not represented in those fields, they were not associated as a good route to them, despite some participants knowing that you could enter the fields via MAs in theory.

The impressions about the pathways were sometimes persistent. A good example of the persistence can be seen in Hazel's journey. She became convinced that to get a good career, she had to go to college and university. This impression was so strong, that even after leaving school early and dropping out of college once, she was insistent that she would go to college and then university when talking to careers advisors who suggested that she could try doing an apprenticeship. The perception was finally changed after a discussion with Hazel's sister whose work involved career information and apprenticeships. Through her personal position as a trusted source with expertise she was able to convince Hazel that apprenticeship could be a viable option for her. Hazel's journey further reflects the findings from Slack et al. (2014) study that sources of information from one's social network (and thus 'hot') can be more effective at influencing young adults than 'official' sources of information.

However, it would be wrong to say that the participants were passively receiving and accepting all information in decision-making. The young adults appeared to trust the influencers operating in the school environment, as well as key personal influencers in some instances during schooling. Since the actors reinforced each other, the messages appear to have gained further credibility. In that sense, the young adults worked out their best options

from the information they were provided. The formation of negative impressions about MAs were strongest when the features of MAs highlighted in the narratives in school went against the young adults' idea of self. By this I mean, if one saw themselves to be successful academically, the perceived emphasis of apprenticeships for those who did not do well academically appeared to discourage young adults to even consider the MA option. In accounts where the young adults did not appear encounter such narratives of MAs they were considered as pathways even to 'non-traditional' apprenticeship fields.

George is a good example of a participant who had a clear interest in a specific field and was open to doing an MA in it to pursue it as a career. In his case, he was aware of apprenticeship options in the field that he was pursuing, but he did not have options among employers that interested him when he was leaving school. This lack of opportunities led him to pursue college education, while still keeping his options open for MAs in the future. After completing his first college qualifications, George attempted to balance his aspiration to reach to his desired field of work, achieving required qualifications, and accruing job experience. Once those concerns became prominent, MA opportunities became increasingly appealing as he did not have a negative impression of them. Therefore, the school narrative for the university – college – MA hierarchy was not universally pervasive across all schools and student experiences but was a feature in most accounts.

If the participants did not consider themselves especially suited to university or studying, then the narratives of MAs were not as limiting for their decision-making. Henry's journey shows this well, where he found the emphasis on work-based learning and useful qualifications as key that maintained his interest, even as the prioritisation of college and university options was present in the school he went to. This suggests that the narratives of hierarchy are resulting in well-performing students to be more likely to ignore the MA option than those who think they are doing 'okay' but do not consider themselves as good at studying. Thus, the self-image element is an important factor in the effects of the narratives.

5.4.2 Pathway choices outside schools "I think I've always had a plan, but that plan has always changed "

The pathway choice process outside the school environment was more varied compared to the process in school. During this second decision-making phase the variability among participants' contextual situations and structural resources appears to have resulted in a greater range of approaches to finding opportunities. A notable feature was that serendipity

appeared to play a role in various accounts for discovering opportunities that the participants were not aware of themselves.

As discussed in section 5.3., when the participants encountered precarious situations, especially regarding work hours or lack of progression, or they felt that the college and university training was not suitable for them, they began to re-examine their earlier choices. For eight participants the reflexive exercise led to a change in pursued field of work. During the decision-making in the post-school context, MA training became an increasingly attractive option for the participants in the sample for the different instrumental reasons outlined in section 5.3 (the aspirations *for* education and training).

Five participants, such as Henry, did not want to study more. Instead, they wanted to work and gain qualifications while working if possible. The learning-while-doing element of MAs was thus connected to the intrinsic aspirations *for* education and training. While the intrinsic preferences in the accounts would not have prevented the participants seeking other forms of education and training, it directed their 'first choices' and thus they sought MA training and would have sought college as an option only if they were unsuccessful in finding MA placements. This demonstrates that not only is interest an important factor in the choice of field, but also in pathway choice.

Information that the young adults utilised outside the school environment varied. Notably, the common narratives about apprenticeships were often not present any longer. The differences in the information sources and support the young adults utilised appeared to relate to the young adults' personal social resources. As the shared institutional influencers were not present any longer, the participants began to turn towards to online resources and personal influencers for information. The different sets of social connections resulted in differences in how the young adults found information about apprenticeships (e.g. what it is like doing an apprenticeship), specific apprenticeship opportunities, and discovering what careers one can enter via MA training. The last part was important for those participants who changed their targeted career aspirations.

Participants appeared to first seek information from their social networks and supplemented it with expert information when the desired information was not present in the personal social networks. Personal influencers were present for the majority (14 out of 15 participants) in either finding information about the fields of work, specific employment opportunities, or in being a part of the reflexive process for those that utilised communicative reflexive mode

(Archer, 2012; Baker, 2019). Personal influencers were also frequently included in the reflexive process. When personal influencers were present in the narratives, they were often part of the decision-making discussions. This indicates that the reflexive process was often not completely internal and that most participants utilised communicative reflexivity. Thirteen participant accounts indicated that communicative reflexive mode was used in at least parts of the decision-making process, usually paired with autonomous reflexivity. The common usage of personal influencers as sources of information at this stage – and the prevalence of institutional influencers as sources of influencers in schools – suggests that easily accessible sources of information were influential in different points of the young adults' journeys. It is also worth highlighting that the school influencers and close personal influencers appeared to be highly trusted in both phases of the journeys.

Five of the fifteen participants who experienced the second decision-making phase included institutional influencers as key influencers outside the school setting when reflecting on their pathway options. A good example of how institutional influencers were utilised can be seen in Fran's journey. She had made connections with a company recruiter at a career event while she was in school. As she began to reflect on her possibilities after Covid disrupted her schooling, she utilised the connection that she had previously established. The way Fran made the connection to the institutional influencer through school shows the importance of networks between influencers and the partnership working practices. The recruiter connection provided all the information about the MA training that Fran needed once she had started to consider it as an option. From the same recruiter, she also learned more about possible jobs that began to interest her more. As such this influencer had a large role in Fran's decision to pursue the MA route into work.

> *"…the woman at the careers fair … she was just amazing. She was so helpful. I think she knew as well that it was my first job and she knew I would really enjoy it" – Fran*

Zoe is another example of a participant who utilised institutional influencers at her workplace to find out more information about MA opportunities that were available. She considered the MA option with an employer, as they discussed the benefits of gaining more qualifications via the arrangement. Zoe is in a unique position in the sample as she was already employed in the field that she was seeking to establish herself. Thus, she had pre-existing connection to the influencers with the employer organisation that offered her the MA opportunity. Zoe's journey is also a good example of how the perceptions that a person has of their capabilities,

as well as the conversion factors present at a given time, affects the range of options considered. Zoe was relatively content in her situation of full-time work before the MA opportunity was presented to her. However, once the opportunity arose she wished to gain further qualifications for future employment security and range of options, which made the presented MA opportunity appealing. The reason she felt that she could pursue the opportunity even after experiencing difficulties in school was that the MA was in her field of work. Crucially, in capabilities approach terms, she felt she had the capability to pursue that aspiration of further qualifications in the field as she had the required conversion factors present at the workplace during the Covid disruption to realise the capability as a functioning (Robeyns, 2017, 2006; Robeyns and Byskov, 2021). In this sense, the Covid disruption of her regular work provided a window of opportunity to pursue further qualifications and unlike when she was making choices in school, this time the set of enablements she had matched her aspirations that she had developed since leaving school.

Another finding in the study was that the role of serendipity (Atkins, 2017) was more prominent in the young adults' accounts when outside the school field. Three participants had instances of serendipitously encountering information that they did not have, but which 'unlocked' an option for them to pursue. The sources of the serendipitous information were both from institutional (1) and personal (2) influencer sources. A great example of the serendipity effect is for Susan, who discovered a person with information about an apprenticeship route to her preferred field (who was also Susan's hairdresser) during an unrelated discussion with her boss:

> *it was a manager at work – I worked in a bar in a bar while I was doing my masters. It was my manager who put me in touch with her because A), I needed my hair done, but manager said "ah, she works for the Scottish government, I know you're quite interested in that, maybe she could help you out?" – Susan*

As in the school context, it would be wrong to say that the young adults were reliant on different influencers and just followed their advice once they were out of school and in effect being directed by structural factors. Instead, the accounts demonstrate reflexivity to a greater extent than the accounts from their time in school did. The participants evaluated the information they found and received over the years, adjusted their perceptions based on new information and sought the best pathway options that satisfied the aspirations and concerns they sought to fulfil. Primary resource for informing themselves about the possible strategy

options and specific apprenticeship opportunities were different jobs sites. These included sites such as indeed.co.uk, which was most frequently named resource. Thus, the role of self-guided information search was more prominent in this context than it was in school.

Six participants from the sample utilised 'cold' online resources as one of the main sources of information on their strategy formulation whereas the others relied more on information received directly from influencers that was 'hot' or 'warm' in nature, consisting of first-hand experiences (Ball and Vincent, 1998; Slack et al., 2014). However, information from job sites and other 'official' sources was not always enough and the participants sought primary (i.e. first-hand) information about the field of work that they were targeting or the experience of being an apprentice if they had the opportunity to do so and were not limited by factors such as time.

5.5 Young adults' transition behaviours and the supporting role of influencers in transition

This section discusses the young adults' approaches or strategies for executing their transitions from school to work and the role of influencers in supporting the successful transitions. My findings suggest that the participants did not use a single transition behaviour, but instead they utilised different behaviours at different stages of their journeys. The analysis is done utilising the tools developed by Evans (2007). Her transition behaviours concept is used to examine young adults' approaches in school-to-work transitions. The role of influencers in the adoption of a transition behaviours appears to be important in the accounts of the young adults. Different influencers supported and encouraged different approaches, depending on their level of involvement in the young adults' transitions.

5.5.1 The approaches for transition enactment

The analysis indicated that approach taken in each stage of the transition journey was connected to the clarity of the person's aspirations or goals as well as their contextual situation. The approaches taken by the young adults appeared to also be affected by the influencers that they encountered and utilised at that point in their journeys. This section examines the transition behaviours of young adults, as conceptualised by Evans (2007), for their careers and the resources and support they utilised in both the formation and execution of the transitions.

The transition behaviours are in some ways connected to the reflexive modalities discussed further in the following section. For example, the strategic transition behaviours in the Evans' approach are included in the autonomous reflexive mode formulation by Archer (Archer, 2012; Evans, 2007). However, while they are similar in that they seek to frame approaches to decision-making, they are distinct in the elements of decision-making that they focus on. The transition behaviours focus predominantly on practical approaches taken to reach the targeted position, whereas modes of reflexivity describe the ways in which decision-makers enact agential reflexivity in decision-making as discussed above. As such, the two are seem complementary and useful tools in examining the transitions when combined. The connections between transition behaviours and reflexive modes are examined in Section 5.6.2.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the transition behaviours framing was developed by Evans (2007) and refer to the different ways in which young adults approach the practical enactment of the pursuit of their goals and aspirations (or addressing of concerns more broadly). The four approaches outlined by Evans are 'strategic', 'taking chances', 'step by step', and 'wait and see' (Evans, 2007). The approaches describe different patterns of behaviours that the young adults can adopt in their transition.

The first two approaches are more active (Evans, 2007). In the strategic approach the decision-maker creates and executes a plan to reach their aspirations. In the 'taking chances' approach, the decision-maker is more reactive to immediate demands. As such, it involves actively pursuing emerging opportunities. The third and fourth approaches are more passive and the young adults are "carried along in socially accepted transition patterns" (Evans 2007, p.86). The 'step-by-step' approach is marked by not having a full plan, or even necessarily a clear idea of the destination. However, the pursuit of milestones is done to enact a transition in accordance with the societal expectations and in pursuit of further opportunities. The last 'wait and see' approach is the most passive one, where the decision-maker is maintaining a status quo until they know what to pursue, or until an opportunity to pursue something comes along.

Context and transition behaviours

While in school, the participants' approaches were predominantly identified as 'strategic' or 'step-by-step'. Differentiating between the two approaches in school was difficult at times. The key differences were dependant on whether the participants had a mapped-out plan to

reach a specific destination, or if they were taking a step towards a less defined aspiration and following conventional transition routes. As most participants chose to pursue pathways that they felt were also expected of them, the pathway choice itself did not provide a strong indication of whether they had adopted a strategic or step-by-step approach. Even in the step-by-step approach, the young adults had a short-term strategy and a support structure around them that guided them to the next step. In these instances, the steps taken tended to be the 'conventional' or 'default' ones, leading to college or university. This pattern of having a strategic or at least step-by-step approach in 12 out of 16 participant's journey while in school appears to be due to the structure present in school affecting the decision-making process. The participants had to devise a strategy to reach an employment or educational destination while they were in school. This was part of the CIAG structures present in the Scottish schools, which are discussed further in Chapter 6.

The exceptions to the strategic or step-by-step approaches were those participants who did not manage to formulate a destination that they wanted to pursue, thus adopting a 'wait and see' approach, and two participants who encountered a barrier in their transitions and who shifted to 'taking chances' approach as a reaction. The 'wait and see' approach was adopted by participants to have more time to decide what they aspired to do after school. William is a good example of a participant with that behaviour, as he went on to work, but the work was intended to be purely temporary to gain more experience in world of work before deciding on what he wanted to do afterwards.

In addition to William, who was identified to be indecisive while in school, early school leavers also demonstrated a wider range of transition behaviours after leaving the school context. While most of them received support to guide them in their transition and formulated plans for it, not everyone did so and left school without a clear plan for future. Marc was one of them. He, much like William, sought to do more work at a location familiar to him while deciding on the next steps after leaving early. The participants whose schooling ended early due to the Covid pandemic were in a situation where the plans that they had devised were not either applicable any longer, or they felt that they could find something better to pursue. In this context the participants adopted a 'taking chances' approach, where they pursued available opportunities that they encountered without formulating a longer-term plan, instead seeking opportunities where there would be scope to make further plans later.

After school, the approaches became more open shifted towards 'taking chances' and 'step-by-step' approaches, with strategic approach becoming less utilised. This indicates a more

reactive approach to transitions in some instances, pursuing opportunities as they arose. In instances where earlier in the participants' journeys the choices were not successfully carried through, the targets of the participants sometimes shifted, as was discussed earlier in this chapter. The participants who had the clearest idea of what they wanted to do continued to utilise the step-by-step or strategic options. Participants who were unsure what they wanted to do utilised either 'taking chances' or 'wait and see' approaches. The participants who were not under contextual pressure to make decisions, i.e., their situation at the time of decision-making was steady, were more likely to take the wait and see approach. This enabled them to see if something that interested them emerged later.

The more passive approaches were found to be ones where serendipity played a more frequent role. In earlier study Atkins (2017) found that serendipity was in a more important role in transitions of marginalised youth who lacked some of the capitals – especially cultural capital – that have most value in education and work. The findings in this study suggest that the young adults who adopt more passive transition behaviours, especially the wait and see approach, rely more on serendipitous information about opportunities than those who actively search for and pursue different options. The cultural and social capitals were also connected to ways that the young adults sought opportunities, as will be discussed further below.

The participants who adopted a strategic approach were also the best informed about their options at the time of decision-making. This meant that they knew about the education and training options available to them not only at that decision-making phase, but also about opportunities in the other pathways going forward. This is connected to the cultural capital that Atkins (2017) discusses in her study. In this study the role of cultural capital became more evident in the journeys after the school context, or the educational field as it is termed in Atkins' study. When the common structures in school were absent, each young adults' personal social and cultural capitals became more prevalent in the journey. However, the used approaches did not appear to be connected to parental socioeconomic status and cultural capital. Instead, the common feature among the participants who utilised a strategic approach was the use of institutional influencers in support of the transition. This did not mean that the participants who utilised institutional influencers always adopted a strategic approach, but the participants that did adopt a strategic approach tended to use institutional influencer support in their transition strategies.

5.5.2 Role of influencers in supporting young adults' enactment of transitions

In addition to the broader situational contexts and the clarity of participants' aspirations, the transition behaviours differed on the level of influencer involvement. The influencer involvement varied in two ways. The first way was the extent to which the influencers were involved in search for opportunities and supporting the transition. Some influencers were heavily involved throughout the process, while others were contributing during specific moments. The second way was whether the influencers taking part in the MA opportunity search were predominantly drawn from the young adult's social networks or if institutional influencers were more prominent.

All but two of the participant accounts in the sample demonstrated independent search for opportunities in some capacity, thus even those who were classified to utilise the more 'passive' approaches were almost always actively pursuing options at least in some stages of their journeys. The independent behaviours consisted of finding opportunities using online resources on their own or they were seeking for employer and training provider contacts directly. The online resources utilised by the participants consisted of jobs sites, such as "Indeed" – which was the most commonly utilised resource in the sample – or resources such as apprenticeships.scot that were specifically focused on apprenticeship opportunities. The utilisation of employers and training providers as resources and as influencers/organisations that guided the transitions was also present in the sample, with 4 participants using them.

The two participants whose accounts did not contain a substantial independent search for opportunities were in different social contexts compared to the others. First, Eliza was still in school and her search for MA opportunities was aided by the teachers in the school, in some ways akin to how other participants were supported through the application process to colleges and universities. The opportunities she found were discovered via volunteering experience with the employers, and the teachers supported the search for these volunteering experiences as well as the MA placement opportunities that she sought. Thus, the institutional influencers present in school were actively guiding Eliza through each stage of the transition from school to MA. This is also reflected in the very strategic approach she took to reaching her aspired destination with steps mapped out throughout the journey with her teachers.

The other participant in a unique situation was Zoe, whose employer offered the MA training opportunity for Zoe during the Covid pandemic. Therefore, she did not have to search for opportunities herself as the opportunity was presented to her by the employer she was already working for at the time. In contrast to Eliza, Zoe adopted a 'wait and see' approach where she was not actively seeking MA opportunities until the employer offered her one. This meant

that she was dependent on serendipity to a greater extent than any other participant in the sample in discovering the opportunity and relied on actions of other actors (Atkins, 2017).

Other participants in the sample performed at least some online searches on their own, but the search was supported by influencers. Those who were supported by personal influencers had their parents, friends, or other relatives help them in search for opportunities. Parents were the most common supporters, and they utilised their own contacts – for example via employer or people they knew – to find available opportunities for the participants. Sometimes the influencers were not present throughout the search process, but encountered an opportunity, for example via social media, and relayed the information of that opportunity to the participants.

> *"it was actually my sister that had seen the opportunity for [Employer] come up and she tagged me in it on Facebook. So I applied to it on the job portal"*
> *– George*

All the participants who utilised personal influencers in transition after school utilised either the 'step-by-step' approach or they combined it with 'taking chances' approach. This appeared to be dependent on whether the influencers were aiding the young adult to find opportunities that they were already considering, or whether they introduced opportunities that the participant had not considered prior to encountering the opportunity, and thus taking a chance pursuing it.

Those participants who did not have social connections to the fields that they were seeking to be working in utilised the self-guided search as well as different institutional support. The forms of support used were local employability support, the Job Centre, Skills Development Scotland, and training providers. Once the participants got in contact with these organisations, they received the key information they needed regarding their search for opportunities, often linking the participants to training providers who worked with different employers. These training providers would then ask the participants to provide all the required information for applications and linked them with potential employer opportunities.

The stage at which the participants got into contact with the institutional organisations appeared to affect the transition behaviours adopted by the young adults. Participants who utilised SDS career advisors or local employability support did so before they were applying for their current MA programs or similar opportunities. Therefore, they received support on how to find opportunities and planned out their goal more, resulting in an approach that

resembled ‘step-by-step’ in the general level – in that this was to get to an entry point in their career journeys – but being strategic in approaching how to reach the first step.

The participant who had the Job Centre present in their journey utilised that connection to get into contact with a training provider while seeking opportunities. Other participants who utilised training providers in their journey reached them individually from job or MA advertisements. However, the support received by the participants was the same. The training providers would ask for information from the young adults and would match them with potential employers in different roles, asking the participants whether they wished that the training providers sent an application for the suggested positions. In these instances, the participants exhibited a ‘taking chances’ approach, as they were open to different opportunities suggested by the training providers. However, the participants could also adopt an approach resembling the ‘step-by-step’ approach when the MA opportunities offered by the training providers were ones that the young adult was pursuing independently as well and formed a step towards a desirable career in a field they felt had potential.

5.6 Key moments for reflexive decision-making in young adults’ journeys

This section of Chapter 5 discusses the key moments for reflexive decision-making in the participants’ journeys. The discussion centres around identifying the key moments, the reasons for why the moments are important, and the modes of reflexivity adopted by the young adults in the different contexts that they occupied. Understanding the contexts of the key moments help us understand why the MA pathway became the preferred option to pursue for the participants. The key moments identified and discussed in the section are at the end of compulsory schooling as well as after the young adults reconsider their earlier choices, which leads to dropping out of university/college or change of careers for the young adults.

5.6.1 The key moments for reflexivity in young adults’ decision-making

The discussion of the participants’ decision-making process in this Chapter has outlined the motivations the young adults had during their decision-making and the aspirations they sought to fulfil as well as the pathway choice and the transition behaviour adopted by the young adults. Through the discussion the importance of the young adults’ decision-making context during their transition journeys has been a focus as the context has been identified to affect the choices made at different times. This section focuses on the key moments at which the reflexive decision-making occurs most clearly in the young adults’ accounts.

Additionally, the section discusses the utilised reflexive modes in the different key moments and the contextual factors present in those moments.

In the CR framework used in this study, young adults are considered as reflexive decision-makers when they have to make choices even in relatively mundane and daily situations (Archer, 2012, 2007, 1995). Reflexive decision-making tends to occur at specific times when something about the situation calls for a choice or an assessment to be made. The choice can be as simple as to keep on following 'a script' to complete a task, which would be almost automatic in situations that are 'standard' (Archer, 2012). However, the 'non-standard' moments, for which there is no existing script in the mind of a decision-maker, are especially important moments. It is these moments in which reflexive decision-making occurs. Archer also argues these moments are prevalent in the situational logic of opportunity, which she posits is present in educational transitions today (Archer, 2012, 2007).

The 'unusual' instances are identified as key moments in the more structuralist approaches, and the CR approaches where habitual action plays a larger role (Akram, 2013). In the structuralist approaches, when the habitus of a person does not contain a pattern of behaviours to adopt in the given situation, a more reflexive decision-making must occur. However, Akram (2013) argues, the dispositions and patterned behaviours that are enacted without conscious decision-making form an important part of human decision-making as it is utilised in many situations. As discussed in Chapter 2, the CR approach has been critiqued for overly diminishing the role of unconscious action and dispositions in some versions (Akram, 2013; Atkinson, 2010a). Therefore, this discussion examines the contexts and conditions in which the conscious reflexive decision-making occurs, and which factors appear to trigger explicit, conscious reflexive decision-making.

Educational choices, especially when people are young, occur at transition points that the decision-makers have not encountered before, and thus do not have a script or a behavioural pattern to follow. This already creates a context where reflexivity is required to make choices if there are not structures that guide a person through. However, even within the educational decision-making journey there are key events in which reflexive decision-making was most clearly present in the young adult participants' accounts. These key events are not defined by length. Instead, they occur in contexts that the young adult faces that necessitate a making of a choice – even if the choice is to do nothing or to maintain a learned behavioural script (Archer, 2012) – and in which the young adults' accounts exhibited usage of reflexivity.

The first key moment in the journeys was the last year before leaving school. The young adults had to make decisions affecting their careers and education even prior to that point – most notably the choice of subjects done around S2 year – but the last year before leaving school appeared to be a key time for making post-school educational choices. As will be discussed further in Chapter 6, the contextual environment in this phase of young people's journeys is designed to have this key period for reflexive choices, and it would prefer the reflexivity to begin even earlier. In the instances where the young people reached their goals during this first transition, like when Eliza reached her aspired position, there is not necessarily a second phase until some years later. However, even when this phase was designed to foster reflexive decision-making, it did not necessarily result in very active planning and strategizing. Indeed, some participants chose to follow what they felt the dominant and expected practices, as was discussed earlier in section 5.4.

The second key phase in the journeys occurred after the participants put their choices into practice. Experiencing their chosen work or education was a key moment for reflexive decision-making. This was most clearly shown in the accounts of participants who pursued university education either immediately after school or after college. Only one participant out of the five who attempted university completed their degree. The key reason for this was the unsatisfactory way to learn in university. The learning was either not found to be enjoyable, fit for their social lives, or was seen to be useless. This led to the young adults reconsider their choice to pursue university education, resulting in them dropping out in favour of working full-time and pursuing other options. Thus, the second key decision-making phase began when they considered leaving university, which resulted in the choice to stop what they were doing.

In each of these journeys, the participants went on to work in a full-time job to have an income and maintain their daily lives. Most common type of 'stop gap' job was retail jobs, but some did agency work or worked in call centres for example. The first reflexive choice was to choose whether to continue in university education while the second focused on the options going forward after leaving university. For some participants these moments were very close to each other, while others were happy to work in their roles for some months before they began to reflect on better options for themselves. The second moment in this phase was usually triggered and shaped by concerns of career progression, stability, or lack of achieved qualifications, which led to aspirations to address the concerns – as was discussed in Section 5.3 in this Chapter.

The young adults who pursued university education were not the only ones who reflected on the fit of the training and their pursued path as they embarked on their education and training after school. Participants who pursued college education went through a similar reflexive process where they assessed whether they were happy with the education and training they were receiving. The mode of learning was not the key issue for the participants in college as it was for those in university. The college students tended to be sufficiently satisfied with that element even if they preferred work-based learning. Instead, the participants tended to reflect on whether the college education they were doing was going to be useful in the long run. Concerns regarding opportunities in the pursued field and the job opportunities awaiting the participants without work experience were key concerns that led to them not finishing their college education.

Thus, the moments of reflexivity occurred when the young adults were attempting to project what they wanted to do in future. The internal reflection could take place over a longer period, or in a short period of time after the participants encountered a potential opportunity. The reflections centred on whether the education/training/work they were doing was what they expected and whether they still felt it was the right option for themselves going forward. The experience of the pathways that the young adults tried was carried on to the decision-making as concerns in the next stages of their journeys. This indicates that the participants became better informed about their own preferences and priorities as the journeys progressed. This resulted in factors like career progression opportunities and the amount of job opportunities available in a field gaining prominence.

5.6.2 Reflexive modes used by the young adults

Reflexive processes were evident in the young adults' accounts of their decision-making. The processes were evident especially when the young adults had to navigate any challenges or barriers. The barriers could be physical and financial – for example expenses of moving to another city or inability to move far away – or related to social and cultural capitals that limited the information that the participants had at their disposal.

To navigate these challenges, the participants appeared to utilise different modes of reflexivity, which were outlined in Chapters 2 and 4. Thirteen participants utilised the communicative reflexive (Archer, 2012; Baker, 2019) mode, where the reflexivity is not only done internally but also discussed with other actors, who in this study are classified as different influencers. In all but two instances, the influencers taking part in this process were

from participants' personal social networks, and thus drawn from their social capital. This reflects the findings of Archer, where young people utilising the communicative reflexive remained embedded in their original social context and tended to replicate it in some ways.

The communicative reflexive mode was often utilised by the young adults alongside the autonomous or meta-reflexive modes of reflexivity. The accounts indicated a sequential pattern, where they had internally reflected on choices available to them, and then seeking from their social connections. For example, Henry included his parents in reflecting on whether to pursue a career in business and administration via MA training or sports career via college, which he was doing at the time. He had already questioned his initial choice of pursuing sport, but wished to get his parents' input as well, since one of them had experience in doing administrative work and was aware of the challenges and opportunities in the field. This way he had already narrowed down the multitude of options to him to two and had formed a preference even prior to the conversation with his parents. Thus, there was evidence of dual modes, much like in Baker's (2019) study where the reflexive modes were utilised at different times and were strategic choices to constraints – such as lack of solid information prior to including influencers in the reflexive process.

The participants who utilised communicative reflexive mode still utilised various influencers for information. However, they appeared to both narrow down their options and to commit to their choices internally. The autonomous mode of reflexivity was evident mode in eight accounts when making choices that led to young people choosing MA training. As was discussed in Section 5.3., instrumental reasons were predominant in the pathway choices for almost all participants in at least one of the two phases. This is a feature of the autonomous reflexive mode where instrumental rationality and leveraging of personal resources are elements that the decision-makers draw from to progress in their careers (Archer, 2012). This is similar to how Rational Choice Theory posits people make choices (Archer, 2012; Goldthorpe, 1998). However, even the pathway choices were not made fully utilising instrumental rationality, as personal preferences also played a large role in ruling out specific options from consideration. This was especially evident in journeys where university education had been attempted but seen to be not suitable for oneself.

The choice of career field was more frequently done based on personal values and preferences than the pathway choice. Archer (2012) has indicated that this is a feature of the meta-reflexive mode. Thus, this study indicates that the different elements of the career choices can be done using different kinds of reflexivity. As will be further discussed in

Chapter 6, the Scottish Career Information, Advice and Guidance structures present in school encourage the young adults to think about personal interest and strengths when considering careers in fields. This could be one reason why the young adults appeared to prioritise those elements in their reflexive decision-making and why that element of meta-reflexivity was relatively common. The meta-reflexivity was not prominent in the accounts during the second decision-making phase as the focus appeared to be in instrumental concerns in decision-making. The data does not suggest gender differences in the used modes of reflexivity.

5.7 Summary

As discussed in this chapter, my findings suggest that the educational choices made during young adults' journeys are in many ways shaped by the structural context at the time of the decision-making. The young adults sought to fulfil their aspirations and priorities both *for* and *through* education through their educational choices. Instrumental considerations appeared in many ways to be adaptive responses to the structural pressures the young adults faced. The key aspirations that the young adults sought to fulfil were usually aspirations *through* education and training and related to establishing oneself onto a good career trajectory.

The journeys appeared to contain two key phases for reflexive decision-making. The first phase consisted of the choices made in the educational field, i.e., in the school environment, where the institutional influencers were common. In the school context, the aspirations and goals that the young adults sought to fulfil were often based on intrinsic preferences, especially *though* education and training. This means that most participants were seeking careers that they thought they would enjoy doing, rather than focusing on employability or other instrumental elements.

The second decision-making phase took place in contexts outside school. This phase was marked by shift in prominent influencers. The role of institutional influencers reduced from being a common presence to something that they had to actively seek it out. As a result, personal influencers were prominent in this phase of decision-making, especially as sources of information and as trusted people brought into communicative reflexivity. Many participants also faced challenges like employment and precarious work, which appears to have resulted in instrumental considerations both *for* and *through* education becoming more prominent in the decision-making.

The different structural contexts present in the two phases appeared to be connected to different transition behaviours utilised by the young adults. During the first key decision-making phase the young adults tended to utilise strategic and step-by-step transition behaviours. The second phase saw some participants shift to taking chances or to step-by-step approaches as they sought MA opportunities.

The reflexive modes appeared to adjust over young adults' journeys. The accounts indicated relatively autonomous decision-making during the first phase, paired communicative reflexive for some. However, when deciding a field of work to pursue, young adults appeared to use meta-reflexivity more often than in the pathway choice. This was also encouraged in some ways by the career advisors. During the second phase more participant accounts showed evidence of increased use of communicative reflexive. The participant consulted their parents and siblings on whether the options they were considering were a good idea, worth pursuing, and sought the opinions of these key influencers as part of the decision-making process. Therefore, the young adults sought ideas and opinions from influencers through these conversations.

Chapter 6: Discussion of Findings II: Influencers in the fields the young adults occupy and the role of Scottish policy in shaping the information in the fields

6.1 Introduction

This chapter builds on the findings discussed in Chapter 5. The focus in this chapter shifts from young adults' journeys into an examination of the structures framing the transitions. The emphasis in this discussion is on the Scottish policies governing the structures, how the policies are enacted into action by influencers – who are agents in their own right – and the resulting decision-making contexts which emerge from the practical implementation of the policies.

Therefore, the structural factors examined in this chapter centre especially on the role of institutional influencers, and how the environments they produce through their actions are influencing young adults' decision-making at different stages of their journeys. The structures examined focus on and around the two key phases of reflexive decision-making identified in Chapter 5. These key moments are the last two years of the senior stage of upper secondary education and the time after participants made a choice to stop pursuing their initial pathway choices.

The data used in the analysis in this chapter includes the young adult interviews discussed in Chapter 5, 11 influencer interviews and 3 policy expert interviews (206 pages in total). The influencers and experts' roles are outlined in Chapter 4, section 4.3. Data from the interviews is used to better understand the roles that these influencers have in the fields that the young adults occupy, and how they work with other influencers via partnership work to try and produce the desired policy outcomes. These discussions are conducted with the policy context and aims in mind, which were examined in detail in Chapter 3.

The chapter is structured to examine the first key decision-making phase in school (section 6.2) and the time after the young adults shifted their pathway choices in the post-school context (section 6.3). The discussion of the school field examines the structures in place for providing young adults in schools with career information and how the policy vision, influencer accounts, and young adults' accounts of their experiences are reflecting a successful support of transitions regarding the information and support for career decision-making they received in school.

The discussion of decision-making in the out-of-school environments examines the roles that influencers had when the young adults were reconsidering their earlier choices. The influencers considered in that discussion are varied as the young adults occupied a broader set of contexts ranging from work, further education, and home. The discussion outlines the structures and institutions that the influence was exerted in and examines the routes young adults took to get into contact with the institutional influencers.

6.2 Influencers in the school field and their role in influencing the young adults' first key transition phase

This section discusses the first key phase of decision-making examined in the study – situated within the school context – as conceptualised in the study's framework utilising the Critical Realist approach (Archer, 2012, 2007, 2003). The key elements examined in the analysis were the structure of the field, the effects of influencers on young adults' reflexivity, and the way influencers enabled the young adults to pursue their aspirations. These are important elements as they appeared to shape which influencers exerted the effects that were present in the young adults' journeys discussed in Chapter 5.

The discussion examines how policies governing the transitions seek to shape the school field and the information presented to young adults in the field. Additionally, both intended and unintended outcomes from policy implementation are examined. This is a key consideration as influencers are agents who bring in their attitudes and information with them to the structural context and can exert their agency in the implementation of the policy. The discussion also draws from the Capability approach concepts of capabilities, functionings, and conversion factors (Robeyns, 2016, 2006; Sen, 1995). Specifically, influencers and social structures set out in the policy are examined as social conversion factors (Robeyns, 2016), potentially providing young adults the freedom required to achieve their capabilities to pursue their agential preferences.

While the emphasis in the discussion is on institutional influencers in school setting, the interaction between home environment and school is also considered in the discussion.

6.2.1 Policy elements governing the schools' information environment

Key influencers outlined in policy and the overall aim of CIAG

The policy elements that govern the transitions from school to work in Scotland were discussed in depth in Chapter 3. This section outlines the key elements of the policies as they

relate to young adults' decision-making while in school. Data from the policy expert interviews is used in this subsection to validate the understanding of the policies from the policy documents as well as to elaborate on the aims of the policies, and especially their implementation.

The education system, including schools that form the system in a local scale, forms a field that contains a specific set of capitals consisting of information, values, priorities and other resources (Atkinson, 2021, 2010a; Grenfell, 2012). In that field values, information, and attitudes are communicated to the young adults through structures and practices enacted by influencers. This includes information provided to the young adults without them having to seek it independently, as well as the resources and support provided to young adults which they need to utilise independently. In the structuralist accounts the young people develop a *habitus,* a sense of what is possible from their past experiences in the fields, guiding their actions going onward in the field (Atkinson, 2021). While the CR approach utilised in this thesis does not require the young adults to internalise the messages, they still encounter and can utilise the resources and discourses in the field context in their decision-making, as was discussed in Chapter 5. This includes the communication of dominant discourses – *doxa* – that are in some ways accepted and taken for granted by at least some of the young adults (Atkinson, 2021; Grenfell, 2012). These discursive and resource elements contribute to the impressions that the young adults have regarding their pathway choices, as well as the *institutional conversion factors* (Hart, 2012) that are supporting young adults' *personal conversion factors* (Robeyns, 2016) to transform their antecedent functionings—or subjectively defined projects/aspirations in CR terms – into valued functionings by fostering the capabilities of young adults to reach them.

The educational field in school does not only include learning activities associated with the core role of schools' mission. In addition to that core task, schools have a responsibility in providing career activities, which are intentionally integrated into schools in the Scottish context through various policies (Scottish Government, 2020, 2018, 2014a, 2011). The DYW is a key strategy in this regard as it provides a framework for how different external actors should interact with schools, thus shaping the ways in which different actors can contribute to the school's CIAG (Career information, advice, and guidance) activities.

The key elements of the DYW examined in this section relate to information and support that young adults receive, or are offered access to, in school environment during the first key decision-making phase. Information is used in a broad sense. It includes forms of official

‘cold’ information, as well as ‘warm’ and ‘hot’ information. In the latter two young adults receive information from their personal social networks or from people that they can relate to as already discussed in Chapter 5 (Ball and Vincent, 1998; Slack et al., 2014). These examined elements include the introduction of Foundation Apprenticeships (FAs) into school environments (Education Scotland, 2015c; Scottish Government, 2014a; Wood et al., 2014), other partnership activities with employers (including employer visits and work experience placements), partnership activities with colleges (doing college course modules while still in school), and the push for ‘better information’ in schools as provided by the actors in the schools (Scottish Government, 2014a; Wood et al., 2014).

Actors that are seen to be key influencers in career education are listed in the career education standard (Education Scotland, 2015a). Those actors include teachers and practitioners in school, career advisors and other SDS staff, employers, and parents (Education Scotland 2015a, p. 7). The policy outlines specific responsibilities for these actors. The influencers’ accounts of their interactions are contrasted against the experiences present in young adults’ accounts and policy intent in Section 6.2.2.

An important part of the ‘better career information’ provision, which is one of the CIAG aims in the DYW strategy, is enacted by careers advisors as their role is to support the young adults through the decision-making process. Career advisors are predominantly responsible for the guidance element in the CIAG, but they also contribute to information and advice elements both directly through interactions with young adults and through providing resources and guidance to teachers when required. Teachers and other practitioners in schools are predominantly responsible for providing the Information and Advice parts of the CIAG provision. Employers and parents/carers are also envisioned to contribute to those elements of the CIAG.

The important elements of the DYW related to influencing young adults’ choices are concerned with providing young people earlier and better careers information and advice that they can use to make their decisions. The DYW strategy document (Scottish Government, 2014a) calls for schools to embed meaningful employer involvement as well as “supporting teachers and practitioners to develop children’s and young people’s learning about the world of work”(p.12).

It is also important to recognise that the information provision and other elements of the CIAG and DYW strategy elements are situated within a wider Scottish education policy

environment which also contains other goals. Those goals include for example the narrowing of the attainment gap (Scottish Government, 2021). However, the different policy aims are not necessarily promoted to the same extent within schools and other educational environments as the people enacting the educational policies tend to prioritise certain key policy targets. This includes the aforementioned narrowing of the attainment gap as well as raising of the numeracy/literacy standards (Humes, 2020; Scottish Government, 2021). In practice, this means that the promotion of different pathways – such as MAs – is not necessarily an equal priority to other concerns. Actors responsible for meeting the priority targets might prioritise literacy and numeracy over ensuring a more equal representation of different pathways to work, as they feel that they should do so in the Scottish educational environment that is characterised by a concern about hierarchies of power and accountability (Humes, 2020).

Assumptions in the policy approach and the key role of information

The elements outlined above are all part of the support environment that seeks to help young adults make better decisions, which is a key element of the CIAG and DYW strategies. The policy elements outline a role for different influencers to provide young adults with information that they in turn use to make their decisions, to develop their skills to manage their transitions to work, and to gain work readiness skills. The policy conceptualises young adults as rational decision-makers who are assumed to make the best choices for themselves. This assumption is central to the human capital approach as well as the narrow reading of the rational choice theory if the choice is assumed to be based on economic return rather than a broader set of motivations that are defined by the participants themselves (Boudon, 1996; Goldthorpe, 1998).

However, the DYW does not set out assumptions regarding the motivations of young adults. However, it aims to prioritise specific growth sectors in for apprenticeships starts increase. This suggests that young adults should make their choices based on employment opportunities. The career education standard provides more insight into the assumed motivations (Education Scotland 2015a). Motivations driving young adults' choices are in part presumed to be – and the policy directs the guidance towards this direction – based on young adults' personal strengths and preferences in the CMS approach.

The CIAG frameworks (Education Scotland, 2015a; Skills Development Scotland, 2012) place an emphasis on "empowering individuals to help themselves by developing career

management skills (CMS)" (Education Scotland 2015a, p.5). Thus policy outlines that schools, SDS, as well as employers and parents to certain extent, have a responsibility to support these transitions. This is set so that young adults can move from school to work efficiently and end up in a positive destination (Education Scotland, 2015a; Scottish Government, 2018).

The role of information and the importance of features such as its relevance, accuracy, and effectiveness is therefore central in the policy as the success of the strategy relies on young adults being well-informed decision-makers. The role of influencers in policy is to act as agents providing a baseline of information to young adults regardless of their home environment. The actors in home environment (parents, carers) are also intended to be recipients of information due to their position as a key influencer in the policy (Education Scotland, 2015a). The policy also has implications for the kind of information young adults receive as the support and information is intended to be relevant to labour market conditions. The labour market information should provide information about opportunities in different fields of work that are available in the labour market. The role of institutional influencers is therefore to act as a common structural influence for all young adults in their occupied field (school) to ensure that the information young adults have in making the 'right' choices for themselves is valid. This in turn should make it more likely that young adults make the right choices.

The policy elements of the DYW appears to target young adults' decision-making during the first key decision-making phase in school. However, policies governing CIAG in school also include elements concerned in long-term career choices. Schools are also environments in which young adults should develop the Career Management Skills, which are meant to enable career management in the long-term (Skills Development Scotland 2012). Careers advisors are especially tasked to help the development of these skills.

This is also an institutional conversion factor element that seeks to build up young adults personal conversion factors, so that they have the ability and freedom to pursue their personal choices (Hart, 2012; Robeyns, 2016). The capacity building seeks to enable young adults' ability to navigate the post-school educational and labour market conditions, and to understand where further information can be found. This builds up young people's capabilities and reduces reliance on careers support offered by the different institutional actors in the long-term. This is a major element from capabilities approach perspective as it seeks to give the young adults the tools to seek the opportunities in their own terms. The

policy experts also articulated a sense of how the career management skills contribute to overall happier lives as they enable young adults to pursue their choices.

> *"I think that is quite significant that these skills should be seen as part of well-being skills. For me career management skills are kind of about happiness. Because we spend so much time, hopefully, in the world of work. … If you get all those things [Elements of CMS] right, you're more likely to be happy in a world of work. So that's why we've seen these skills are so important." – Policy expert 3*

6.2.2 CIAG and influencers enacting it in schools

The analysis of the structures was conducted using document analysis and interview data from the different participants groups. The first step was to identify the responsibilities assigned to these key institutional actors in policy and in documents outlining approaches for implementation (Scottish Government, 2018, 2014a, 2011; Skills Development Scotland, 2012). This was followed by analysis of career advisor and policy expert interview accounts reflecting on the intent and execution of their practice as part of the CIAG environment. Finally, the accounts of career advisors outlining their practice, and the practices of other actors present in their schools, was contrasted with the experiences outlined in the young adult interviews.

The analysis of the structures affecting the information and support available to the young adults identified three key actors in the school environment. These are career advisors, teachers (both subject teachers and guidance/pastoral teachers) and visiting influencers. The last group consists mostly of employer and educational institution representatives.

Interviews with the participants groups, as well as the DYW strategy documentation and the standards guiding the implementation of the strategy (Education Scotland, 2015a; Scottish Government, 2018, 2014a), all identified teachers and careers advisors as having an important institutional role in young adults' transitions as they are still in school. Prior studies have also identified the importance of career guidance in supporting young adults' choices not only in school context, but also in subsequent education and training placements and outside those institutional settings (D'Angelo and Dollinger, 2021). The importance of career guidance has been noted in liberal skills systems like Australia, where participation in career activities was suggested to be connected to career choice capability (Galliott and Graham, 2015). This is potentially very important especially in the more open-ended liberal systems

where the paths that young adults can follow are less rigid, as was discussed in Chapter 2 (Evans, 2007, 2002). In those contexts, support navigating the options can enable young adults to make choices with better information, know how to navigate the processes to enter the different pathways, and to develop skills that help them navigate the skill system (D'Angelo and Dollinger, 2021).

So, the different sets of practices that seek to provide young adults with the 'better information' are enacted by various actors and there is no single actor responsible for the targeted outcome. Career advisors, while an important group of actors, are just one of the actors who are responsible CIAG activities. However, their role is to offer a specialised service where they utilise their labour market and career information in guidance. The guidance is delivered both via "group work" provided for classes of young people, as well as through one-to-one discussions with pupils. Information and guidance delivered via these two activities differs in the level of personalisation. However, there are some key principles that the information and advice provided through the activities follows. As career advisors are generally provided to schools by Skills Development Scotland (potential exceptions to this being private schools and academies), they are an expert third-party influencer.

A basic feature of the careers advisor guidance in the Scottish policy is that the advice they provide is 'neutral' in the sense that it does advocate for young adults to enter any specific educational pathway or field of work.

> *Their role is to be impartial advisors. It is not their role to turn around and say to a young people, or teachers, or anyone else "you should do A, B, or C". It's their job to actually coach people … it is their job to do to raise awareness. And it is their job to challenge stereotypes. – Policy expert 1*

Teachers' responsibilities regarding the CIAG activities are broadly defined in the Career Education Standard (Education Scotland, 2015a). The responsibilities assigned to the teachers include to supporting the pupils' decision-making through information (about careers in the teachers' subject areas for example) and helping them develop the required skills to execute their journeys. However, teachers are also responsible for their professional development, keeping up to date with labour market information, and forging connections with employers. The responsibilities also specifically mention encouraging young people "to consider a broader view of subject choices, career options, and job opportunities" (Education Scotland 2015a, p. 10), indicating a role in broadening the range of options potentially considered by

young adults rather than just highlighting commonly known careers. Teachers were identified as an important group of influencers in all participant groups. Despite the prominence in the Scottish policy and in the young adults' accounts, teachers have occasionally been underrated as an important actor in past research, as has been highlighted by Delay (2022).

The analysis identified two forms of information provision by both the career advisors and the teachers in the school setting. The first of these is the "universal" provision of information, which the actors provide to all pupils in group settings. The second element consists of a more individualised information tailored specifically for individual pupils. This distinction is especially clear for career advisors, but an element of this distinction –even if less formalised – was present also in the young adults' accounts regarding teacher interactions.

General information about pathways and careers

General information consists of information provided to large groups of pupils and the delivered information is the same to everyone without it being tailored for any individual's interests.

Career advisors called this part of the information and resources they provide "the universal offer". The universal offer comprises of the digital offer, i.e., resources that the young adults and teachers can access online, as well as 'group work'. Group work is a delivery of information in a lesson like format where the career advisors inform the pupils in a classroom setting about the different pathway options and other careers related information. Together these form the blended offer which focuses specifically on information and advice elements of the CIAG offering.

The teacher equivalent of the universal offer is the information they provide to their classes about career opportunities in their taught subject areas. In both the career advisor and the policy expert accounts this was seen as the most common form of DYW activity implementation by the subject teachers. These mentions of career opportunities can be integrated into the lessons with relatively little effort, and it fulfils the aims of the DYW, at least partially. This makes them a popular way to implement the policy in the classroom.

The universal provision of information was present in all three participant groups' accounts. The most prominent element was the group work delivered by the career advisors. These group work sessions were focused on the junior phase (S1-S3) and formed major part of the career advisors' interaction with the young adults in school at that stage.

The information provided in these group work sessions usually consisted of basic information about the pathway options available to the young adults, subject choices and the importance of subject choices in career choices. The purpose of the sessions was to ensure that all the young adults are aware of the available range of pathways into careers. The aim of providing a common baseline of information appears to have been achieved by these sessions. All the young adult participants, who went through Scottish secondary education, recalled these sessions and learned the basics of the pathway options through them. The finding was also reinforced in the career advisor interviews as their experience was that the young adults, when they met with the advisors on one-to-one basis, were usually well informed about the range options available to them.

The career adviser interviews also suggested that the young adults were often aware of the breadth of the MA frameworks available to them as well. However, the young adult accounts suggested that the knowledge regarding the breadth of options was not as universal as the awareness of the existence of the pathways. For example, some participants wished they had known about apprenticeship pathway options to their current fields in school, rather than learning about the options after school. The information about different options they received often originated from career advisors. This pattern was reinforced by the career advisor accounts of their practice, as it involved communicating different MA opportunities to young people directly, or to teachers who then in turn were to relay the information to potentially interested young adults.

> *"[Apprenticeships in] Business was never really mentioned. Which I am quite shocked at to be honest. … our careers advisor made us aware of any apprenticeships that were open, she advertised them, gave us presentations, assemblies, sent us email, stuff like that. So they [apprenticeships generally] were advertised and very much spoken about… but… again not as many as we should have been told about." – Alice*

The delivery of career information by teachers during classroom activities appeared to be less uniform than the career advisor information. For example, the subject teachers of young adults in the study's sample did not necessarily discuss all the pathways one could utilise to pursue the careers that they highlighted as part of their classroom DYW activities. Indeed, as the career advisors reflected, the extent to which teachers mentioned apprenticeships as a possible way to enter a career in a subject area was strongly dependent on the teachers themselves.

> *"you are very reliant on the school's culture and the subject's culture. Some teachers are very proactive about saying "you're good at this subject so you could do an apprenticeship in it, or you could go a university and read it" and there's some teachers who say "you're very good at this so you could do it at a university" or "you're not… academically gifted so why don't you look at an apprenticeship in something else" you know, so it is very dependent on individual teacher and pupil."* – Career Advisor 3

The young adults accounts indicated that mentions of MA options during class-activities were rare. Only two accounts suggested that MA options and routes to careers were discussed by their teachers. This indicates that as far as the pathways to the careers are considered, the teachers appear to be focused on the academic routes. A possible reason for this was suggested by a career advisor, who reflected that as teachers themselves had completed the academic route to work via university, they are most familiar with that route and more likely to mention it.

Earlier studies, especially those utilising the structuralist approach, have argued that the reproduction of the teachers' own experiences arguably contributes to the reproduction of existing attitudes regarding careers (Atkinson, 2010a; Bourdieu, 1977; Smith, 2009b). Specifically in this instance, it appears to contribute to the notion that *the way* to reach a good career is via the academic route. Additionally, the lack of discussion of apprenticeships as an option to enter a variety of fields appears to have contributed to the idea that apprenticeships are mostly suitable for entry into the traditional apprenticeship fields of work consisting predominantly of manual labour.

As an element of the CIAG system in schools, the universal offer consists mostly of neutral and 'cold' provided to the young adults since for the most part it utilises official information from various institutions (Ball and Vincent, 1998; Slack et al., 2014). However, it is worth noting that some career advisors in the sample mentioned using real people's journeys as examples to make the information more relatable to the young adults. This would introduce an element of 'warm' information to the offer, which has been found to be more trusted by young adults in past studies (Ball and Vincent, 1998; Slack et al., 2014). In the young adults' accounts these universal information sessions did not appear to be influencing the choices of fields or pathways. Thus, the baseline information delivered via the group sessions and via subject teachers had to be paired with other forms of information to provide more specific

information and support helping the young adults thinking towards their preferred career options.

In theory, the universal information provision should ensure that lack of knowledge about the pathways is not a structural factor binding or limiting young adults' agency (Archer, 2012; Evans, 2002). As the offering is delivered via classroom-based sessions to everyone, it fulfils its function as an equalising baseline regardless of the influencers the young people contain in their social circles via their social capital, which has implications for the equality element of careers guidance policies (D'Angelo and Dollinger, 2021; Galliott and Graham, 2015). From an equality angle these sessions are important for providing the baseline information regardless of the social network connections contained in participants' social networks.

However, information alone is not necessarily sufficient as a conversion factor to foster young adults' freedom to pursue their options and aspirations. This is due to other barriers that affect the journeys. Conversion factors are important in enabling the conversion of those aspirations and motivations (capabilities) into functionings (Robeyns, 2016; Robeyns and Byskov, 2021). The support to convert the capabilities to functionings was commonly done through structures supporting the execution of the applications to universities, colleges, and apprenticeships. Teachers played an important role in providing this practical support in navigating the system.

Within the teacher influencer group there is a key subgroup present each kind of participant account, which are guidance teachers, or pastoral teachers as they are also called in some schools. These guidance teachers occupy a role that is more involved in CIAG activities than a subject teacher. One of the most prominent ways guidance teachers were present in the young adults' accounts was via sessions where they guided the young adults through university and college application processes. The guidance teachers are also points of contact for the pupils to discuss issues and ask questions regarding their educational decision-making.

The support of the guidance teachers was potentially specialised and tailored to the young adults' interests, as was the case for Eliza in the young adult sample. Her teacher would provide her with specific information about available volunteering opportunities in the local area and would help Eliza with the careers advisor to pursue her career in her preferred field. However, when the young adults were not as sure about what they wanted to do the support appears to have been more generic. In those instances, the focus was on the young adults

getting good grades and to ensure that they have applied somewhere, or at least had a plan going forward.

One of the frequently mentioned elements of support in the young adults' accounts appears to have signalled the schools' prioritisation of university as the default option for young people. This element was the emphasis on university subject choices and application processes. The support activities going to university were so prominent, that it was the most prevalent career and further education related activity that the participants mentioned when inquired about career information they received in school. Whether the training to manage university applications started in Years S5 or S6, it formed a large portion of the career related activities the young adults remembered experiencing. By placing the university option as the most prominent option, the guidance/pastoral teachers (or other teachers running the sessions) signalled to the young adults that it was the preferred choice. University became to be seen as the option that was the most reliable route to a successful career and other options were to be entertained in case one could not go to university for some reason. Similar support was also offered for college applications if one had decided to pursue college, but university was still seen as the most prominent option.

The aim of the practical support activities is to lower the practical barriers of application to universities (or the other options when they were the focus), which does fulfil an important role as a conversion factor. The universality of these measures is also positive in the sense that it provides this support to all pupils, and they are not reliant on their personal influencers for the execution of the applications. Thus, the practice has equity implications as it ensures at least some support that is not tied to the social and cultural capitals during schooling. The support also allowed the young adults to make and execute decisions to go to university or college without the need to involve their parents in the process. This support potentially contributed to the prevalence of the autonomous and meta-reflexivity elements of the young adults at this stage as was discussed in Chapter 5. However, the way the support is enacted appears to have resulted in the unintended consequence that the university was seen the preferred and default route to careers when that is not the stated aim. At least not in the DYW and the CIAG policies (Education Scotland, 2015a; Scottish Government, 2014a; Wood et al., 2014).

The role of information resources in school

The universally available information and advice offer does not only consist of the class-based lessons delivered by teachers and career advisors, even though they form the core of the offer that is *delivered* to the young adults. The other key part of the offer is the online resources, which form a substantial part of the Scottish CIAG. Unlike the delivered parts of the universal offer, the online resources require the young adults themselves to be proactive in utilising them.

This means that, if they are inclined to do so, there are resources for young adults to use to in search for careers related information. These resources include information about careers in different fields, online tools to help identify some potential career options that are suited oneself, as well as other usable resources (Skills Development Scotland, 2022c). However, the young adults were not always keen to use these resources. This was evident in some of the Career Advisor accounts, where the young adults who needed most support were not always as proactive as the advisors hoped, resulting in them having to find information for the young adults.

> *"Normally, you'd try to get them to do the research on their own. Like "why don't you go look at boatbuilding" but you know that are some that just, you talk to them the next week and they'll go "oh I haven't done that"."* – Career Advisor 7

The key online resource called My World of Work played a key role in the career advisors' practice. Some advisors utilised the resource as a foundation on top of which their coaching and guidance was built on.

> *My World of Work is a foundation of a house, that's how I visualise it. And the guidance and the support we provide, it incorporates roof, walls, furnishing. It is adding to that layer of support.* – Career Advisor 5

All advisors referred their clients to the resource and to its tools, which are intended to help the young adults clarify their ideas and to work as a repository of information that they could use at any time. However, My World of Work did not appear to be utilised much by young adults in the sample. Instead, during this key stage of their decision-making journey, the resources and information they utilised appeared to be mostly from different influencers. At this stage the influencers they were interacting with appeared to be mostly from the educational institutions, but some had conversations with their parents as well. Some participants supplemented the information from influencers through personal search for

information, using resources such as college and university websites to learn more about course contents.

This suggests that the usefulness of such self-driven resource can be limited by the young adults' transition behaviours and belief on whether a service like that would be useful. In the young adult sample of the study, the My World of Work resource was not utilised even though it should have been familiar to the pupils as the service forms a key part of the CIAG resource offer.

Personalised CIAG enacted by careers advisors

The general information provided to everyone in common sessions is not the only form of CIAG activity provided in the school environment. The elements of CIAG that are tailored to an individual are called personalised CIAG in this study.

The career advisors had a clear distinction in the elements of CIAG that they provide, with the "universal offer" being supported by the "targeted offer" comprising of one-to-one discussions with the young adults. The one-to-one sessions were generally conducted alone with the young adults – parents could be included if the young person wished for that – and the content of the sessions was tailored to the young adults' needs. Despite the individualised nature of the guidance, the neutrality of the information was a persistent feature in these sessions and the advisors did not seek to push the young adults towards any specific careers. The one-to-one sessions were conducted for students predominantly in the in the senior phase (S5 and S6), but the pupils also went through shorter one-to-one sessions with the advisors regarding subject choices during the S2 year. The analysis focuses on the sessions conducted in senior phase as they are centred on the career choices.

The process of enacting careers advice in the one-to-one sessions with the young adults in schools was similar in all the career advisor accounts who worked in schools. The advisors all outlined the usage of the coaching approach in their interactions with the young adults and the development of the Career Management Skills (CMS) was a central aim in the interactions with the young adults (Education Scotland, 2015a; Skills Development Scotland, 2012). The CMS and its elements were outlined in more detail in Section 3.4.

The needs of the pupils dictated which sections of the CMS the career advisors focused on with the young adults. The approach first sought to make young adults be aware of their own strengths and aspirations. This was seen to be necessary for the young adults to be able to make choices that were a good fit for themselves. Sometimes the young adults had to be

made aware that it is indeed their responsibility to make choices about their career and that the career advisor's role was not to make that choice for them.

> *"Because I think when they hear "careers advisor" they sometimes I sort of tell them what to do. … But I wouldn't say to someone 'oh it sounds like you should be a joiner'" – Career Advisor 2*

This emphasises the Scottish system's approach to enable the young adults' to make choices, but to also have them be responsible for making those choices rather than having an early pathing that directs the young people to the 'next stage' as some of the collectivist skills systems have been identified to do (Busemeyer and Trampusch, 2011a; Evans, 2002; Glauser and Becker, 2016).

Once the supported pupil was identified to have a good idea of their strengths, desires and goals, the support shifted towards realising those goals. The discussions focused on helping the young adults understand the opportunities available to them (horizons in CMS terms). Horizons element is firmly connected with information. However, it did not focus on just providing the young adults with information. Instead, it is focused on helping the young adults find relevant information on their own by highlighting starting points for research into options.

Finally, the Horizons component of the CMS approach also sought to help the young adults identify the social connections and resources which they could use to gain work experience in the field or to find career pathways and jobs (Networks; Skills Development Scotland 2012). The connections element was identified by many of the career advisors to be an area that required focus during the personalised guidance sessions.

> *a lot of people who are wanting to go into work, do not have or they do not know how to access a network that they already might have. – Career Advisor 3*

A key element of the career advisor guidance was in building up the capacity in the young adults themselves to make decisions as they were leaving school but also after that in the long-term.

The career advisors' expertise regarding the local employment opportunities and labour market conditions was an important part of the provided guidance. The career advisors suggested that they encountered young people who were not aware many challenges that they might face in finding job and education opportunities. Sometimes the career advisors had to

also provide information about the possible pathways into the careers that the young adults targeted. This included mentioning possible MA pathway opportunities to fields like business. Interestingly, this was a gap in many young adult participants' knowledge about career opportunities when they were in school. These participants were also categorised for lower levels of support, so they would not have met their career advisors often.

Individualised careers advise and reflexive decision-making

Examining the personalised support using the CR approach identified three key aspects that encouraged the young adults to reflect on their strengths, preferences, weaknesses. These approaches appeared to encourage the young adults to make choices consciously through reflexive decision-making and to utilise thinking associated with different reflexive modes.

The first element encouraging the reflexive decision-making is the focus on personal interests and strengths. The principles of the CMS approach appear to steer the young adults' thinking towards pursuing careers they find interesting and where they would feel comfortable working for a long time. In this way the approach appears to push young adults towards pursuing their intrinsic aspirations, rather than focusing on careers with instrumental benefits like good income. This approach of focusing on personal values and passions is close to what Archer associated with the meta-reflexive mode of reflexivity (Archer, 2012). The career advisors appeared to consciously emphasise this element. Generally, the young adults appeared to make decisions using this approach even when they did not have extensive conversations with the career advisors, as was discussed in Chapter 5.

The second element is the emphasis on helping the young adults use their personal social connections and other resources they can access through their social connections. The reason for this emphasis is the potential that these connections have accessing the career fields that the young adults seek to enter. If one has connections to a field, they can find out more information about working in the field. Importantly this kind of information consists of first-hand accounts of people's experiences in the field, which has been found to be persuasive in prior studies (Slack et al., 2014). Concrete information and experience about jobs in a field is seen to help the young adults prepare for work in that field. However, a lack of connections to careers that the young adults are interested in can pose a barrier in becoming better informed and gaining access to the field. The leveraging of advantages to advance in one's career is associated with the autonomous reflexivity in Archer's formulation (Archer, 2012).

The young adult accounts in the study showed that the tended to leverage personal social connections when seeking opportunities. This was especially evident in the second key decision-making phase. It cannot be claimed that the young adults as a cohort learn this approach from the career advisors since the personalised support is targeted rather than universal, and thus this coaching is not experienced by everyone. However, in instances where the young adults would not have realised to leverage their social connections the support from the career advisors or guidance teachers could have helped them to increase their chances of success and to find good information about the career options.

The career advisor accounts contained multiple instances of this form of guidance being one of the key elements that their clients needed. It is worth noting that the guidance also prompted the young adults to utilise events where they can make their own connections to potential careers of interest. An example of such events included career events where the young adults could come to contact with employer representatives. These forms of events, which are not connected to the personal social resources, potentially lower the barriers of entry to fields that the young adults do not have pre-existing connections to – as was done by one young adult in this study.

The final element encouraging the reflexive decision-making at this stage is the emphasis on development of career skills for the long-term. As the Chapter 5 discussion indicated, educational decision-making does not happen in one specific moment but is spread across years in an iterative process. This finding is also reflected in earlier studies, such as those from D'Angelo and Dollinger (2021). Even those participants who stuck to their chosen strategy and had a clear idea where they wanted to work – for example George – had to make numerous choices during their journey. The potentially long journeys emphasise the importance of knowing how to approach career planning, being aware of one's options, and knowing where to find support and information when needed. The career management skills are intended to be a set of tools that they can use to make choices that work for them. This way they are not reliant on another person telling them what they should do. So, in a sense the career management skills seek to foster usage of independent reflexivity (autonomous and meta-reflexive modes) in the young adults through activities that in many ways resembles communicative reflexivity.

Additionally, the structures present in school, with the regular communication with either career advisor and/or guidance teacher, the structure may encourage communicative reflexivity behaviours as young adults needed to discuss their plans with others. However,

young adults appeared to in some instances merely report their plans to their guidance teachers, rather than actively deliberate their choices with them. As such, it is not clear that the structure fosters communicative reflexivity as much as ensures that young adults have been thinking about their options and are recognised if they need further support.

However, while the career advisor accounts suggested a strong focus in these long-term elements, the young adult participant accounts of the meetings with advisors indicated emphasis on the immediate transition to further education after school. This could be due to the limited amount of contact hours they had with the advisors, as the participants appeared to be in the minimum or medium support categories. As such, the limited time could result in a short-term focus. The young adult accounts indicated that they also received information on the pathway options available to them, but most of the participants had already decided to pursue college or university before meeting their advisors. Thus, the role of career advisors appears to have been limited for most young adults in the study. The categorisation of the young adult participants into the lower intensity offerings appears to be due to the teachers having determined that they will have no issues in their transition to the next destination. As such, they were deemed to have achieved the functionings deemed necessary by the school (and the advisors to some extent in the process) in CA terms. The lower intensity categorisation means that they mostly supported by teachers rather than careers advisors. In this way the career advisors' resources were directed to those who were seen to need most support and the young adults of this study did not fall into that category.

The analysis also suggests that if young adults had formed an idea about a career to pursue as well as the pathway to pursue it, their career advisors are not necessarily emphasising the other pathway options to the young adults. Therefore, if the discourses in the school narrative have already influenced young adults' choices, the personalised support with the career advisors does not necessarily counter any perceptions that they might have formed.

The individualised guidance and advice provided by career advisors was generally viewed positively by the young adults. However, Henry felt that his career advisor pushed him away from MA training when he was recommended to go to college after school. He was told it was the recommendation in order to gain relevant qualifications and experience before pursuing MA training to maximise his chances. However, Henry felt that this was just another person in the school discouraging him from pursuing MA training.

The issue looks potentially different from the career advisor's angle. The career advisor accounts indicated that the challenges involved in finding an MA placement were often underestimated by the young people. As such, at least in the eyes of some careers advisors, doing a year in college prior to the apprenticeship is a sensible way to gain an edge – or balance some of the advantages – compared to other applicants that are likely to pursue the roles.

> *So… you kind of have to say "well let's take a look at what you need" and "does sound like what you were thinking? Oh, no it's not? Well let's take a look at…" It's not to say that they won't achieve that. But at that point their goal doesn't match what their reality is I suppose. And it's trying to do that without sounding like "you can't do that" – Career Advisor 5*

Thus, the perceived realities – as seen by the career advisors and the young adults – are not always matching.

Individualised support from teachers

The final portion of the individualised support discussion focuses on the advice and information provided by the teachers. Receiving individualised support from teachers at this stage of the journeys was not common in the young adults' accounts. Nonetheless, teachers played a significant role in three accounts as they provided personalised information and support regarding pathways into careers. In the career advisor accounts the CIAG component for subject teachers tends to focus on emphasising different career opportunities in the teachers' taught subjects' fields. However, the extent to which the teachers support young people with the CIAG activities appears to dependent on the agents (teachers) themselves, as well as the pupils that they interact with. In three young adults' accounts teachers provided individualised support. The support consisted of helping the participants understand the opportunities available to them and learning what the education and work would be like in practice. This support was conducted through one-to-one discussions and was provided in addition to the general information that they provided in the classroom setting. In one young adult account the teachers even helped her find relevant volunteering opportunities to gain further experience.

The findings suggest that two different factors are required for these deeper support interactions to occur. The first factor is the teacher's willingness to dedicate time to provide

the guidance, even when they are not the guidance teacher for the young adult in question. The second factor is the need for the young adult to seek this individualised support through interactions with the relevant teacher.

Therefore, the teacher-pupil interactions emphasise the need for an active agential choice to be made by both the pupil and the teacher to engage in this individualised support. This contrasts with fulfilling the DYW responsibilities by highlighting different career options within the teacher's subject area to the class in a less individualised manner. Teachers need to decide whether they wish to provide this further information to the young adults and thus potentially influence their choices. I argue that this demonstrates well the active role of the influencers in choosing to provide influence as well as deciding on the form of provided influence. For the personalised influence to occur, teachers need to be aware that the young adults are interested in a career in their subject area and be both willing and able to support them in some way. Thus, the influence exerted even by institutional influencers, where part of their role is to influence young adults, is dependent on several factors coming together.

Another important element of the influence exerted by the teachers was a long-term effect on young adults' field-of-work preferences. At least four participants explicitly indicated that they developed career field preferences through their school subject experiences. This form of influence was difficult to categorise as either general or personalised, as it is in many ways a mixture of both.

Teachers' impact of pupils' school performance through their classroom practice has been examined in other studies (Nurmi et al., 2012), but the findings in this study suggest that pupil's enjoyment of the subject area can also shape young adults' career choices. George's journey, outlined in Chapter 5, demonstrated this link between enjoying the subject (and teaching) and wanting to pursue a career in the field. However, the impact of performance and enjoyment in a school subject were present in other journeys as well, such as those of Alice and Colin. In these accounts of participants journeys the positive impressions of a school subject was generalised into a positive impression of the fields of work associated with the subject. This in turn appears to have led to an intrinsic preference towards those subject areas and the participants wanted to pursue them for careers even when they had not necessarily achieved qualifications in the subjects. The preferences formed later in school, even after main subject choices were made, could thus still be impactful.

The importance of the learning experience, including what the pupils enjoy and what they are good at, is recognised formally in the CMS approach that was discussed in the section above. Additionally, the enjoyment of school subjects is used as an approach to identify young adults' strengths in the careers advisor sessions. Since the Scottish CIAG approach emphasises young adults' personal preferences in what they enjoy doing, the role of teachers and their effect on the pupils' subject experience has the potential to be an important factor in shaping career decisions.

The implications of the targeted support offer on young adults' journeys

The impact of careers advisors for participants on the minimum support offering appears to have been minimal due to limited contact with the advisors. The influencers that the participants in the minimum targeted offer encountered while in school were predominantly teachers and influencers brought into the school environment. Therefore, their information about the pathways was more reliant on the general information, information from personal social connections, and what the teachers in school provided to them in more personalised capacity.

This could be one of the reasons for the lack of representation for the apprenticeship pathway in the young adults' accounts. Since they were categorised into the minimum intensity bracket for the face-to-face interactions, they would have had to specifically request to speak to careers advisors. This important as the career advisors appear to be the best-informed influencers in the school environment about apprenticeships since the SDS manages both the apprenticeships offer as well as the career services. This is of course when considering career advisors as a category of influencers as individual differences between influencers remain. The other influencers at school, which formed most of the young adults' interactions, tended to not mention apprenticeships in the young adults' accounts. The exception to this was Eliza's journey where she received plenty of support and information about MAs, but it is worth noting that she was pursuing a field where apprenticeships were a well-established route to work.

The delivery of support to young adults appeared to vary in some ways between schools. This appeared to be connected both to established school-wide practices as well as relative workloads of the different actors. For example, some career advisors discussed the process of filling applications and CVs with the young people, but others tended not to discuss that.

Instead, in those cases they directed the young adults to go and discuss the practical processes with their guidance and subject teachers.

The targeting of the offer and support is done to ensure that those deemed to be most in need of the coached guidance from the career advisors are the ones that receive it. This has substantial implications for the equality element of the offer, which is a part of the DYW policy considerations (Scottish Government, 2014a). As the young adult participants in the study were utilising practices that the CMS approach would encourage, there is an argument to be made that they did not need the support. However, this appears to have potentially led to some information gaps. Specifically, the lack of information about MA opportunities in non-traditional apprenticeship fields.

6.2.3 The employer partnership activities contributing to the perception of the pathways

The last important group of influencers at this decision-making phase were employer representatives. Their interaction with the young adults occurred via the partnership activities organised between schools and employers. Most of these activities took place in schools and were organised by the schools themselves. The policy expert and career advisor accounts indicated that some teachers in each school had been assigned the responsibility for organising the partnership activities with employers. Other actors, such as career advisors, were not taking a major role in deciding the kinds of partnership activities the school would organise. However, some advisors indicated that they were occasionally consulted to better understand what kinds of activities and employers needed to be represented. This suggests variation in practices between schools, resulting in potential for different partnership activity patterns.

There are four significant parties involved in organising the career activities in schools. Two of the parties – regional DYW groups and the SDS – are responsible for enabling connections between schools and employers. The other two parties – schools and employers – are responsible for making connections and agreeing on both the form and frequency of the partnership activities. Schools and employers are ultimately responsible for organising the activities and ensuring an ongoing relationship for continued activities. There are also partnership activities with schools and colleges, but the discussion in this research focuses on the school-employer partnerships.

The coordination between schools and employers occurs via two routes: The DYW regional groups and online portals. The portals include the SDS Marketplace and some 3rd party portals such as Founders4Schools. The DYW coordinators are responsible for organising employers regionally and bringing the employers into schools' attention as potential partners. The Marketplace works similarly but is a platform that always shows all the available options for schools across the country.

Majority of the activities are 'low level' transactional activities. These activities include company introductions and presentations that the employer come perform in schools. The more intensive forms of partnership activities include work experience placements and FAs. These are rarer and while the young adults accounts included many work experience placements, FAs were not prominent in the young adults' accounts.

> *So, an employer would come in and give advice on how their workplace works, how they got to their career. What qualifications they might be looking for in their industry. So that's information and advice. – Policy expert 3*

Visits from employers and educational institutions were the most common form of partnership activity in the young adults' accounts. These activities were present in each young adults' accounts, but the types of visitors to the schools varied depending on their location. However, according to the experts, the previously opaque process of contacts between schools and employers has become more transparent and accessible to schools via the Marketplace portal discussed above. Thus, the potential for more activities that span the local and regional boundaries is greater and the schools have a better idea of the overall offer of partnership activities.

The potential effects of these kinds of visits have been examined to some extent in earlier studies. Some relevant studies include ones examining the role that different influencers have on young people's university choices (Ball and Vincent, 1998; Slack et al., 2014). In the studies the type of influencer – including their positionality or role – affected how effective their message was. The young people perceived university representatives with the 'official' message providing a curated message that was in effect an advertisement rather than a frank account of what is the best option. The participants did not express distrust towards the official sources in this sample, even when they were marketing the company they worked for. However, the type of information the influencers provided was seen to affect the usefulness

of the message. The young adults valued accounts of the representatives' personal journeys and examples of how people have come to work for them. The personal accounts of people that were 'like them' (Slack et al., 2014) thus appeared to be of specific interest to the young adults as it would demonstrate a proven route to the job that could be applicable to their own situation.

Therefore, the journeys of the people representing the companies mattered. Alice reflected feeling that all the examples of successful entries to business field – which she pursued – were of people going to universities and colleges rather than apprenticeships. This contributed to the perception that one should pursue college and university pathways to achieve success. Additionally, the jobs that were represented by people that had done apprenticeships were in many ways 'traditional' apprenticeship fields. This was in contrast to covering the broad range of apprenticeship frameworks available in practice. Thus, apprenticeships were associated with fields and roles such as construction worker, plumber, electrician, and nursery teacher.

> *"We had quest visitors coming into school talking about apprenticeships and stuff like that. Again, very much spoken about technical, engineering, electrical, stuff like that labour jobs" - Alice*

Most participants perceived apprenticeships as *the* route to the 'manual labour'. The route was represented by predominantly male dominated jobs, with some specific examples from female dominated jobs in the mix that were usually related to nursing. The findings suggested that the employer visits stemming from partnership activities represented the pathways generally, rather than just being a single example to a specific job. This contributed to the whole apprenticeship pathway being targeted to men in the eyes of two young women.

> *"I think… a lot of the teachers and everyone who tried to come in and speak to us about apprenticeships were very… not to become sexist or anything, but it was very much aimed at the boys. … So, I think a lot of the teachers just tried to aim apprenticeships towards them. And I mean they kind of just forced the girls to apply for college and uni type thing." – Alice*

The perceptions of the pathways did not arise solely from these partnership activities, but the activities contributed to the narratives that were discussed in the Section 6.2.2 about the

pathway options. The effectiveness of the visits on field of work preferences appeared limited in the study. Only a minority of participants recalled being interested in the field that the employers were presenting to them during the school visits. Unless the participants were interested in some element of the jobs presented to them through the employer visits, the attention paid to them was limited regarding the specifics of the job. However, the generalised perception of the routes leading to fields of work appeared to be retained after the sessions even when the specifics of the employer led sessions ended.

As discussed in Chapter 5, most young adult participants formed their career aspirations and plans in the senior stage. This is also when the CIAG activities related to the formulation and execution of their career plans began. However, the participants' impressions regarding their pathway options – including perceptions of worth and gendered perception of the offering – was formed over a longer period in school and at home. This suggests that the activities seeking to address issues such as gendered perceptions of fields of work or pathway choices are important even before the last senior years. If they occur earlier, they may be able to counter the dominant discourses that are deemed undesirable in policy terms.

The young adults' accounts suggested that having activities, even if they're 'low intensity', which go against the hierarchy of option narrative is important. For example, few of the young adults suggested that if finance or business organisations came into schools to talk about apprenticeship options, their impression of apprenticeships could have been different. As information about those options after school changed young adults' perception later in their journeys, that same information at an earlier time could potentially have that same effect earlier in the young adults' journeys.

Besides being sites for other influencers to come engage with young people, schools also organise access for young adults to experience workplaces via different partnership activities outlined in the relevant guidance documents for partnership activities (Education Scotland, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c). These documents outline the responsibilities and entitlements of the different stakeholders to achieve the DYW strategy targets (Scottish Government, 2014a; Wood et al., 2014), as was discussed in Chapter 3.

Work experience placements are a part of the DYW partnership activities available for young people in Scottish schools (Education Scotland, 2015b) and were an influential form of partnership activity in four participants' journeys. Opportunities for one-to-one interactions and experiencing the job, rather than just hearing someone talk about it was valuable in

teaching young adults the practicalities of the job and discovering if they enjoyed the work tasks associated with the role.

The format of work placements can vary, but the fundamentals appear to be the same. The purpose of these placements, from the policy perspective regarding the young people in schools, is to help them build up skills needed for work, as well as expose them to different careers. For four young adult participant these work placements – and subsequent volunteering experiences in Eliza's journey – encouraged them to pursue a career in the experienced field after school.

For three of the four participants the work experience placement let them experience a field that they were either interested in before the placement. These placements strengthened the interest after enjoying the work that they did during the placement. For Eliza the placement in nursing, which was already her identified passion beforehand, sparked an interest in pursuing further experience via continued volunteer work in the local nurseries. Thus, the role that the placements had in the decision-making was a confirmatory one. The placements reinforced the existing interest towards the fields and made the young adults more passionate about pursuing a career in the field. These participants had singular fields that they pursued and formulated plans for entering the fields which were achievable and realistic – both via college and university pathways as well as apprenticeships.

For the fourth participant the work experience was conducted at a company where his relative worked – demonstrating the effect of social capital also in organising work placements when connections exist. He found the job sufficiently enjoyable to pursue, but the account was not reflecting a real passion towards the field of work. Instead, the big pull towards the field stemmed from the reassurances he received, that if he completed a university degree in the field, he would have a job afterwards with the company. This was enough for him to pursue the field in university. In contrast to the other three participants whose post-school pathway and career choices were reinforced in the placements, the instrumental reasons for the career were the key in this instance, although the work fulfilled the 'enjoyable enough' threshold that was also discussed in Chapter 5 in young adults' considerations. Since Colin did not have options that he was more interested in pursuing, the instrumental motivations for pursuing the field led him to pursue the field.

The third way that the work experience placements could influence the decision-making is of course to rule out options in the young adults' minds – a function that one of the policy

experts highlighted during the interviews. The young adult accounts of the decision-making did not contain reflections of rejecting a potential career idea based on work placement experiences. However, the accounts contained several instances where their post-school work experiences helped them realise which jobs they did not want to do in the long-term. There is no reason to think that this effect could not be achieved by the work-experience placements during school as well, which is why this role of the work experience should be considered when thinking about the effects of such placements on young adults' choices.

6.3. Post-school moments of reflexive decision-making and the role of influencers in supporting the choices

The second key phase of reflexivity in most of the young adult accounts occurred once the young adults had left the school context and experienced the post-school context in practice. In most accounts this was the phase when reflection on the choices made in school began in earnest and they began to weigh between different options going forward. As was discussed in Chapter 5, most of the young adults' journeys to MA training often contained this second key decision-making phase and it was at this point that the majority decided to pursue MA training.

The second decision-making phase consisted of individualised contexts that were dictated by the circumstances the young adults ended up in after completing their prior training or after quitting their further education early. The analysis of this section examines the role of the influencers during this reflexive decision-making phase, including how they influence the decision-making and how they support the successful transition to the targeted MA programs.

I argue that the key influencers in the young adults' decision to pursue MA training are predominantly not institutional influencers – even though in two journeys the institutional influencers were key for the young adults' choice to pursue MA training. Instead, the driver for pursuing MA training appeared to stem from personal influencers or from self-guided research into possible options. Secondly, I argue that the role of the DYW and other policy structures is more limited at this phase of the journey and the influence of the key influencers from the previous stage consists predominantly of the long-term skills building that they helped the young adults to develop. Finally, the key forms of influence at this stage consisted of helping the young adults to find potential concrete opportunities to pursue when they utilised independent reflexive modes, as well as taking part in the reflexive decision-making when the young adults utilised communicative reflexive mode.

6.3.1 Career advisors and employability support as regular personalised guides in moments of re-adjustment

The role of personalised support was key in the post-school decision-making context. Unlike in school, there was no structure present where a 'universal' distribution of information could occur. The lack of shared context meant that the important influencers differed among the young adults at this stage of their journeys. Despite the differentiation, career advisors and other similar institutions offering support in employability had an important role in four young adults' journeys and a smaller supportive presence in two more journeys.

The SDS career services offering was found to be very similar to the employability support offering in important ways. As such, the two services are discussed together. The largest difference was that the employability support provided by the local councils did not include the career coaching element (which included the CMS approach) and the same online resources. However, both services had their network of connections to address challenges beyond careers, offered support in finding job opportunities, and prepared the young adults to apply for them.

The career services outside school were different from the services offered in school in two ways. First, career services offering was always personalised when the young adults interacted with the service and there was no equivalent to the 'universal offer'. This also meant that advisors, especially those in "work coach" roles, spent potentially more time in one-to-one engagement with their clients than the advisors in schools. Second was the increased need of young adults' personal initiative to reach the service. Unless the young adults were specifically referred to a publicly accessible careers service centres by some other institutional actors, they had to take the initiative to get the support. This is a great contrast to the previous decision-making phase where the young adults were in a more controlled CIAG environment.

Fundamental approach to the career guidance is the same out of school as it was in schools. The career advisors acted as impartial experts who sought to support their clients to make decisions, but do not make them for the clients. As was the case in the school setting, this role of career advisors was sometimes misunderstood with clients expecting a more prescriptive service than the offered coaching-based service.

The support from the career advisors, as well as from the local employability support workers, was individualised according to the client needs at the time. The barriers that the

young adults, as well as clients beyond that age bracket, were varied and thus the service focuses on the barriers that the young adults have in the different stages of the decision-making. The career advisor and support worker accounts indicated that some clients they meet in this phase of the journeys have several issues that need addressing in their lives, and the focus on careers might not start until after several meetings and interventions to prepare the young adults to even think about careers.

> *"So sometimes you find yourself dealing with things which are not… overtly career related. … obviously you're trying to direct them to people who can help them more with those kinds of things. Most of them already have those kind of people in their lives, social workers or criminal justice, alcohol workers and stuff. Erm… but sometimes it's just easier than… "I'll just do it" because it's easier than getting someone else to, you know. Email someone else to ask them to do it." Career Advisor*

The young adults in the study did not face such challenges. As such, support addressing those elements was not required in their journeys. However, the SDS careers service appears to be ensuring that all their clients have the capability to make the career choices and as such the CMS approach is utilised in the process. The range of support offered to clients through the services has equity implications. The broad service offering can potentially people in the most difficult situations to get the help they need, in addition to getting support in their career related issues. The partnership work between different institutions is therefore an important feature of the whole service network that prepares the potential clients for work and longer-term stability.

The career guidance element itself was alike in accounts from career advisors in school and out of school settings. Thus, the mechanisms of effect in the approach are the same in both phases of decision-making as far as the career services are concerned. The young adult participants who utilised the publicly accessible career services found them to be especially useful in addressing the practical barriers and challenges that they faced. The barriers consisted of lacking specific information to make a choice, lack of support in the application process, and the development of confidence in the applications for work.

The young adult accounts did not contain evidence of the career and employability support services shifting the young adults towards specific careers. However, they appeared to shift

the participants' thinking regarding the work-based learning pathway and MAs specifically in two instances. While these services contributed towards the shift, the influencing effects from the neutral information and guidance from the advisors was limited on its own. The greatest influence was seen when the institutional influencers provided practical support in finding education and training opportunities, providing resources to find those opportunities, as well as when they emphasised the validity of the MA route to careers.

Hazel's journey exemplified the limited effects of the neutral information without the personal influencer component. She went to a career advisor after dropping out of college, and the advisor informed her about the different options that she could pursue. During the conversation, she felt insistent on going back to college and information about the MA and other opportunities did not make her change her mind at that point. However, after these meetings with the career advisor, when Hazel discussed the issue with her family, her sister managed to convince her that MAs are a valid option to get into good careers. As such, Hazel had received information on how to find MA opportunities and had different influencers telling her that MA is a valid route to careers in addition to college and university. While the career advisor alone had not managed to convince Hazel to consider MAs as an option, the meeting contributed to the overall set of influences she experienced at that time.

Both the young adult accounts and the career advisor accounts indicated that the advisors did not seek to direct young adults' career choices towards specific fields. However, the career advisors became a part of communicative reflexive mode with the young adults as they discussed the different career and pathway options with them. While the role appeared to be mostly about providing information to the young adults so that they could make their own choices, the advisors did provide advice that could potentially influence young adults. However, in all instances the young adults also utilised communicative reflexive with their personal influencers before making their choices.

Career services and employability support were also involved in providing practical support, which encouraged the young adults to pursue their desired careers. Kate's journey was a good example of how the careers services can help with practical elements, such as ensuring the CV is in a good state and knowing where to find opportunities. These issues were addressed over a longer period through regular meetings where the service was personalised to her needs. Through these meetings Kate was confident that her applications were good, and these forms of practical support also helped her feel more confident in applying for opportunities.

I was in touch with Skills Development Scotland for a long time and I went to meet with them quite regularly in one of their centres. … So I had everything prepared because I had a skills agency, whose – it was literally their job to was to get me a job, so I had a big support network. – Kate

However, while Kate was confident in the practical elements of her applications, she felt that a fear of failing was holding her back from applying to opportunities that could have been successful. It did not appear that the institutional influencers had a role in alleviating those insecurities. Instead, Kate sought support from her close personal influencers addressing them. Thus, the career advisors were very good at providing Kate the practical support to maximise her chances of successful application, but the support was relatively narrow in scope and targeted the specific challenges that she voiced to the advisor. The support appears to have been very important as a conversion factor for Kate as it enabled her to convert her capabilities (aspirations) into functionings through the application process. This suggests that career advisors can be helpful in building up young adults' capabilities by addressing the barriers that they have in their pursuit for careers in the post-school context.

6.3.2 Employers and training providers as sources of support and influence outside schools

Other institutional influencers present in the young adults' accounts were company recruiters and training provides. Recruiters and company representatives were present in the earlier phase as well, but the influence and support they offered was different between the two decision-making phases. Training providers were not present in the earlier stage but were present in three young adult accounts during this phase. Training providers were present as structure enabling the young adults to form a structured approach when seeking opportunities. The training provider influencers were employees of the organisation who handled the case work related to the participants.

Company recruiters building young adults' capabilities

Company recruiters were present in schools due to the employer partnership activities as well as links that the employers have to career events organised by the local councils. These two settings appeared to be key sites in which the recruiters could promote the company as an employer and to attract potential workers. The employer recruiter interviewed for this study is from a large company with several locations both in the UK and Ireland. The company also

provides apprenticeship training on modern apprenticeship and graduate apprenticeship levels.

The recruiter activities appeared to have two core aims. First, in the short term, is to attract young adults who wish to work for the company immediately after school via their apprenticeship programs. The second part is a long-term goal to raise the profile of the company among the young adults so that they are aware of them as an employer no matter what pathway they seek from school-to-work. This combination of the long- and short-term goals in the activities means that the company is not seeking to persuade the young adults into a specific training pathway. Instead, they offer a range of entry points where MA is just one of them. However, different companies are likely to have different strategies and emphasis, and as such this is just one snapshot into the recruiter priorities in the process.

The offered apprenticeship options influenced Fran from the young adult participants to consider MA training for herself as she began to question the desirability of her initial choices made in school. Thus, just the presence of the apprenticeship options that were not part of the 'traditional' understanding of apprenticeship fields did make Fran consider MA as a potential option. Another important element in Fran's decision was the advertised Graduate Apprenticeship opportunities within the company.

> *"... after you finish your apprenticeship year, you can get into a graduate role and you can actually do a degree during your actual role. And I said that's quite good. Because I didn't want to go university but it's always there if I want to."* - Fran

The GA offering made the MA training more attractive as it signalled advancement opportunities and the ability to get a degree at a later date without having to be in a full-time academic study. The combination of the preferred work-based learning with desirable qualifications made MA and GA opportunities especially attractive. Importantly, while the recruiter managed to get Fran's attention and interest during career fair events while Fran was still in school, most of the interaction between Fran and the company/recruiter occurred after leaving school early due to the Covid pandemic. As such, the choice to pursue MA training constitutes a recalibration of the choices made in the first key decision-making phase.

The initial contact between the recruiter and the young adult was facilitated by teachers in school, highlighting the importance of the promotion of such career events in institutional settings. The career events are for the young adults a forum through which they can acquire

information about specific employers and career options. For the employers the events are avenues for attracting talent into the company as well as creating a positive impression of the company for the young adults. The content presented to the young adults in these events is similar to the school visits, but the young adults have more scope to ask questions in person on one-to-one basis.

The participating young adults are self-directed in these events. This means that they are not forced to interact with all the employer representatives and instead the interests of the young adults drive the initial engagement and discussions with the representatives. As such, the recruiters are seeking to find an angle that would make the young adult interested in working for the company.

These kinds of activities that introduce more options and examples of successful pathways into careers can potentially broaden the young adults' pool of options that they consider between, and thus any influencer that provides this kind of information and insight to a young adult can act as a key influencer.

Besides informing the young adults of possible career opportunities, the recruiters provided extensive support in the application process. Similarly, to career advisors and employability support workers, the recruiters helped the young adults to refine their CVs, cover letters, and to prepare for interviews. The recruiter logic for providing this support was to ensure that they can find the best potential employees if they ensure that the young adults can make the best case for themselves. As such, skills in navigating the application process does not emerge as a major differentiating factor, allowing the applicant's qualities to come through. As such, the company recruiters can support young adults' career skills development in addition to helping them match with careers that are a good fit.

6.3.3 Personal influencers as the baseline support and influence in post-school context

The last group of influencers discussed in this chapter are personal influencers. Their role as key influencers has been examined in various earlier studies where they have been found to influence the young adults in different ways (Hatcher, 1998; Hegna and Smette, 2017; Rolfsman, 2020). Examples of this include the fields of work the young adults pursue (Atkinson, 2017) as well as routes to careers (Ball, 2002; Hegna and Smette, 2017; Rolfsman, 2020). Therefore, the importance of the personal influencers has been established. This discussion seeks to focus on when and how they contribute to the decision-making process.

As discussed in Chapter 5, family members (carers, parents, siblings) contributed to the reinforcement of the dominant discourses regarding the pathway options in at least 3 young adults' journeys. In families with no apprenticeship experience or familiarity the apprenticeship pathway was not seen as a route to good careers. This was seen especially clearly in Hazel's journey where different family members contributed both to the reinforcement of the negative impressions and the reversal of those impressions. The family influencers did not necessarily override the influence originating from schools, as Alice's journey showed. While one of her parents was advocating for the benefits of an apprenticeship pathway, she still chose to pursue a route in line with the dominant narrative present in their school environment. However, after leaving school early due to the Covid pandemic, the parental influence appeared to result in the young adult giving the MA another look. This resulted in her investigating apprenticeship options independently and choosing to pursue MA training.

The influence exerted by the personal influencers appeared to vary depending on the knowledge and experiences of the influencers themselves. Additionally, some influencers appeared to be more inclined to try and convince the young adults to pursue any specific pathway option or career. This was present in the young adults' accounts as well as observation made by the career advisors in their practice. The variation in the parental approaches meant that there was no 'common' way they acted based on their educational background.

Parents of the young adult participants were supportive of practically all of the pathway choices and field choices that the young adults made. The young adult participants recalled expressions of support for the choices, even if the parents would have advocated for different pathway or career. However, the careers advisors reflected that they had encountered two different reactions from the young adults when their parents were opposing career ideas. Those young adults who were close with their family and valued the social connections highly– connected with the tendency to utilise communicative reflexive mode (Archer, 2007) – were more likely to pursue careers that matched their parents' preferences rather than what they were personally interested in.

The variance in both the parental and young adult attitudes in that interaction means that the effect is strongest when the parents have strong opinions on the 'correct' pathway, combined with young adults' desire to minimise conflicts in their relationship with their parents. The

young adult participants who utilised the communicative reflexive in this study also tended to consider the parents' or siblings' views and advice when making choices.

Parental attitudes and support can also influence the continued pursuit of chosen career options. As outlined in Chapter 5, Kate's journey demonstrated how the support from a parent figure can help the young adults to persist in their pursuit of their preferred option rather than giving up on it and seeking something that they feel they are more likely to successfully achieve. Thus, the parental support can contribute to the sense of capability and perseverance. This support can manifest through practical actions, such as parents helping the young adults to execute the choice and thus being a conversion factor in enabling the capability to seek the desired functionings (Robeyns and Byskov, 2021; Walker, 2005), or it can occur through verbal encouragement that makes the young adults persist in their chosen course. Both forms of support were present in this study in practically every young adult account.

The influence of personal influencer appeared to increase in the second key phase of decision-making. In some instances, the participants began to investigate the types of jobs their parents did and even pursued similar career when the perceived fit was good. The findings suggest that the choice of career field was not automatically related to what the parent of the same gender was employed in. Indeed, in journeys where parents were a key influencer, the influential parent was usually mother. The factor that appeared to dictate whether a parent influenced career field choices was whether the parent's career was something that the young adult could see themselves doing. In this study the careers of participants' fathers were often oriented towards manual trades, which did not interest the young adults. As a result, the young adults appeared to be more influenced by their mothers' careers, which were often in different administrative positions.

6.4 The pandemic impact on practice and increase of digital offering

The Covid pandemic had wide-ranging impacts on countries around the world, including Scotland where the study was situated. The pandemic caused several challenges for the young adults seeking to transition from school to work, or indeed one job to another in pursuit of a desired career. The key effect in the young adult accounts was the negative effect that the pandemic had on the number of available opportunities. The number of MA starts went down drastically in 2020 compared to the preceding years (Skills Development Scotland, 2022a) and this was evident even in the limited number of apprentice accounts in this study. The

career advisors also reflected on the smaller pool of opportunities in the labour market and the young adults' response to it. The response appeared to often be to pursue college or university education, or stay in school for as long as possible, to delay the entry into the labour market.

This study could only capture those young adults who went into apprenticeships despite the pandemic. The interesting finding was that the apprenticeships were sought despite having college placements in two instances. However, the reason for seeking those opportunities appears to have been a better fit with what the young adults wanted to do, indicating intrinsic reasons for pursuing the opportunities.

The pandemic also posed a challenge for the institutional structures supporting the transitions into work. Suddenly, there were fewer jobs available, and the career advisor accounts indicated that even apprentices who had placements lost them in many instances. As a response, the support offering was targeted towards those who were deemed most vulnerable in the pandemic labour market. This meant that young people, with specific focus on those who lost their placements or whose transition to education and training was disrupted by the pandemic, received specific focus.

The service offer transformed in response to the pandemic. Face-to-face offer reduced and was not available at times. The client interactions were instead conducted either via voice-calls or video-calls. Careers advisors reflected that the shift caused challenges especially in reaching the most vulnerable populations. This meant, that the targeted service towards those who were deemed to be most at need, were not always reachable and therefore did not receive the support that was offered to them. The equity impact of this cannot be quantified in this study, but many practitioners interviewed in the study were worried about the impact this had on the most vulnerable clients.

However, the response to the pandemic also caused changes that can be seen to be positive. The planned advances in the digital offer of support to young adults and the broadening of long-distance school-employer partnerships were accelerated during the pandemic. This was done to enable the functioning of the activities during lockdowns. The advisors indicated that the intention is to keep utilising the flexibility of the online and long-distance partnerships and client tools where appropriate. This would support the traditional face-to-face and location bound forms of service. Therefore, the long-term effects of the pandemic on practice of careers advisors as well as other influencers could include increased long-distance

offering. This could in theory result in a broader representation of careers to young adults as the employers from farther away can be brought into schools digitally. This could be a potential way to address the unintended consequence of partnership activities outlined both Chapters 5 and 6. However, this development has not taken place and it remains to be seen if the tools are utilised in such way in future. Further study on the effects of the pandemic on the support offered to the young adults as well as on the school-employer partnerships is recommended to better understand the realised effects in the long-term.

6.5 Summary

This chapter further examined how the Scottish CIAG policy structure and influencers affected the young adults' journeys discussed in Chapter 5, and how those structures support young adults in different positions. The policy in Scotland seeks to empower the decision-makers through support, which means that young adults have a responsibility of their transitions from school-to-work, but different actors around them have a responsibility to support that transition. I examined how career advisors sought to coach their young adult clients both in schools and out of schools, and how those Career Management Skills might aid young people in their transitions. Other influencers' (including teachers, company representatives' and employer support workers') practices and their potential effects were discussed as well. Finally, the way the change in decision-making context over young adults' journeys appears to have made personal influencers more accessible, and more prominent as influencers, was discussed in this Chapter.

Chapter 7: Conclusions: Addressing the research questions and implications of the study to supporting young adults' school-to-work transitions

This thesis has investigated the educational decision-making among young adults who have pursued Modern Apprenticeship (MA) training in Scotland. These young adults have sought the work-based learning pathway in the Scottish skills system. The pathway has historically been underrepresented compared to the academic pathways in the Scottish liberal system, as was discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. I have examined young adults' motivations and aspirations, how different fields and contexts contained different influencers, how those influencers affected young adults' choices to pursue vocational education, and how the decision-making process has taken place reflexively.

I argue that both personal and institutional influencers are key actors in young adults' decision-making as they are in many ways how young adults interact with structures that organise the social reality that the young adults occupy (Archer, 2012, 2007, 2003). Additionally, this study elaborates on the ways through which the key influencers influence young adults' decision-making. Influencers appeared to predominantly influence young adults' choices by either 1) producing information and perceptions of fields and pathways and 2) enabling young adults' capability to pursue educational pathway options through practical actions and support, and 3) contributing to the communicative reflexive decision-making by providing their opinions about the options that young people considered.

The following research questions were developed to examine the different elements of young adults' decision-making and the role that institutions and key influencers play in it. These specific research questions help us understand why young adults pursue MA training, and why they pursue it at a specific point in their journeys:

1. What are the main reasons for young adults to go into apprenticeship training?
2. Who are the key influencers to young adults and at what stages of their journeys?
3. In what ways do the influencers affect young adults' decision-making about their post-compulsory education and training?
4. How do influencers support and influence young adults when planning and executing an approach to pursue post-school pathway choices?

5. How are the policy DYW policy elements, such as the partnership activities in schools – including the reformed apprenticeships pathway – influencing young adults' choices to pursue Modern Apprenticeships?

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part discusses each of the research questions above using the findings outlined in Chapter 5 and 6. The questions are discussed in order in sections 7.1.1 – 7.1.4. The first part finishes with a summary of the original contribution of this study. The analysis and discussion bring the findings to the context of earlier research literature. The discussion and informed by the research framework, which was outlined in Chapter 4. The framework contains elements from:

1) Archer's Critical Realism approach (Archer, 2012, 2007, 2003, 1995)
2) Capabilities Approach (McGrath et al., 2020; Robeyns and Byskov, 2021; Walker, 2005)
3) Elements of the Bourdesian approach (Atkinson, 2021; Bourdieu, 1977)

The second part of the Chapter contains a discussion of policy and practice implications emerging from the findings, limitations of the study, and avenues for future research. The findings are examined in the broader context of prior literature on young adults' educational decision-making, discussed in Chapter 2 and in the Scottish skills system and policy context discussed in Chapters 2 and 3.

7.1 Main findings and discussion

7.1.1 Young adults' motivations and aspirations in decision-making

The first research question examined the reasons young adults pursued Modern Apprenticeship (MA) training in the Scottish skills system.

RQ1: **What are the main reasons for young adults to seek apprenticeship training?**

To answer this question, I examined the motivations of the young adults, why the participants pursued MA training, and why they chose to pursue MAs at specific phases of their journeys. Additionally, the expectations of the Scottish strategies and policies governing the transitions were analysed and the fit of the expected behaviours to those shown in the young adults' accounts was examined. These factors combined give us an understanding of 1) what the policy assumptions are regarding young adults' motivations, 2) what the young adults tried to achieve through their choices, 3) which concerns the MA pathway choice addressed, 4) and

how the decision-making context affected the perceived fit of MA to young adults' aspirations and concerns.

The policy assumptions regarding young adults' career motivations

The policies governing the careers information, advice, and guidance (CIAG) were interpreted to have an implied theory on how young adults choose their careers, as the policies seek to foster specific strengths and considerations in the young adults' decision-making.

The policies and strategies appear to place a strong emphasis on supporting is the young adults' personal strengths and preferences in the Career Management Skills Framework (CMS; Skills Development Scotland 2012). This is emphasized by some of the influencers in the school environment, especially career advisors, who encourage the young adults focus on those elements when deciding *what* they want to do.

The CMS framework guides the approach of the career advisors' practice (Skills Development Scotland, 2012). The respect of and emphasis on the young adults' intrinsic preferences appeared to be consistently implemented through the career advisors' practice in the interview accounts, as was discussed in Chapter 6. The fulfilment of personal preferences through educational choices is also a part of the Scottish Careers Strategy (Scottish Government, 2020), but the strategy also contains other factors for consideration. One of the key elements balancing the intrinsic preferences of the young adults appears to be information about the labour market conditions and the prospects of being employed at the end of the training and education. The instrumental considerations are predominantly considered in the policy through the question of employability at the end of the training.

The instrumental considerations were also considered in the career advisor practices. For example, the labour market conditions in the regions that the young adults wanted to be employed in were considered in the advice and guidance provided to the young adults. As such, the policy appears to assume that the young adults seek fields of work that they intrinsically enjoy, but also consider factors such as employment opportunities in their decision-making.

Young adults' motivations and aspirations both *for* and *through* education and training

The findings indicated that the young adults sought to address a variety of concerns and aspirations through their choice to pursue MA training. Those aspirations – i.e., future aims, goals, and dream work roles – were divided into aspirations *for* and *through* education and

training. Earlier studies had examined them similarly (Aldinucci et al., 2021; Carling and Collins, 2018), which allowed them to further interrogate the reasons young people had for their choices and aspirations

My findings indicated that most of the participants had aspirations *through* education as the primary driver when making career choices. These aspirations were commonly centred around: 1) achieving a career in a field that the participants were interested in; 2) achieving a 'good career' with regards to career progress potential, but with a less defined idea regarding the field of work; or 3) to achieve a career with stability and variety of employment opportunities. If the young adults had a field they were intrinsically interested in, aspirations tended to be expressed through them. If they had experienced precarious work, the young adults aspired for stable careers with a substantial number of opportunities to find the area within the field that interested them the most. Therefore, when the young adults did not have a clear intrinsic preference for work, the aspirations were framed more in terms of instrumental considerations like career potential. Finally, if they had experienced precarious work, those instrumental concerns became even more prominent.

Participants' intrinsic preferences – when present – were a core part of the career choices consideration, especially in the first key phase of decision-making while in school. The intrinsic preferences were directed towards specific types of work, such as wanting to work in business, or work with children. During the first key decision-making phase, a majority of the young adults emphasised their intrinsic aspiration for a personally satisfying careers when choosing a field of work to pursue. The exception was when the young adults did not have a clear intrinsic preference, in which case they pursued options that were seen to be instrumentally beneficial.

The participant accounts also demonstrated aspirations *for* education and training. However, these aspirations appeared to be secondary in some ways as pathway choices were made in service of the aspirations *through* education and training in most accounts. As such, the motivations for pursuing the specific *pathways* – including apprenticeships – were often focused on instrumental aspirations. Three participants indicated an intrinsic preference for work-based learning, which made them prefer MAs over college. As a result, the instrumental reasons appeared to be important in pathway choices for most participants. In the second key decision-making phase the MA training fulfilled the aspirations *for* work-based learning as well as the instrumental concerns of the young adults. As such, the intrinsic preferences and instrumental concerns were not clashing in the consideration. As a result, the MA option

appeared to be especially attractive to young adults with intrinsic preferences *for* work-based learning. Five the participants aspired *for* work-based learning to at least some extent and no participant indicated dislike for work-based learning.

Earlier studies have found that some young adults aspire *for* university specifically (Aldinucci et al., 2021) even in contexts where those aspirations are difficult to realise. This study also found evidence of aspirations *for* university from three young adults' accounts. Reasons for the university aspiration were centred around the opportunities that a university degree would unlock for future careers. Therefore, the instrumental benefits from having a university degree appeared to drive the aspirations. Additionally, three young adult participants indicated future aspirations of seeking graduate or postgraduate level qualifications more generally. While all three considered university as a route to those qualifications, they also viewed the graduate apprenticeship pathway as a possibility. The other young adult participants also aspired *for* further education and training opportunities as part of their work, but they did not voice aspirations for additional formal qualifications on a degree level or higher. Instead, their plans for further training appeared to be less concrete and something that they would figure out after working in their jobs for a little longer.

Therefore, my findings indicate that, while present, the intrinsic aspirations *for* education and training were in a relatively small role for participants in this study. In a sense the aspirations *for* education and training were short-term aspirations that served as a step towards the longer-term goals and as such were centred around instrumental benefits that would serve a successful transition.

Reflexive decision-making and the conditions in which MAs became attractive

Most of the young adults in the study did not seek apprenticeship training in school. Instead, most sought higher education (HE) pathways at the end of their compulsory education. Of the 16 young adults in the sample one had completed HE up to master's level qualifications prior to seeking MA training and two participants had completed college qualifications (at least HNC level). Of the rest only five participants went to MA training as their first qualification leading training. Others had attempted either college or university after school but had ended up quitting before completing their chosen college or degree program. This reflects the pattern of applications among the majority of the Scottish young adults (Scottish Funding Council, 2022b; Skills Development Scotland, 2022a).

The young sought to fulfil their aspirations and address their concerns through their choices, which they made reflexively. This means that the choice to pursue MAs was not made because it was the only option that the young adults felt capable doing. Instead, the choice to pursue MAs was made when it was deemed to be a suitable way to address the participants' aspirations while addressing the instrumental concerns they had.

As will be discussed in the Section 7.1.2, the information that many young adults received in school during their first decision-making phase appears to have resulted in an impression that MAs were not a suitable way to address the participants' career aspirations. These impressions changed later in those participants' journeys, which is when MAs started to be considered by most participants. Influencers appeared to have a large role in forming these impressions, which is why that element is discussed in more detail in the next Section.

However, MA was also a way to address some barriers and instrumental concerns that the young adults had in reaching their aspired careers. An important barrier addressed through MAs was not achieving necessary grades for HE (university or college) or not achieving good enough grades to graduate from those pathways. In these instances, the MA option emerged as an accessible option that did not require the participants to do further studies. This not only allowed them to pursue work-based learning as an alternative to academic studies, but it also allowed them to feel like they are progressing rather than standing still. This was also in one instance combined with the perceived lack of capability to complete the college or university pathway. In that instance, MA became the preferred alternative to just working full-time and slowly progressing one's career that way.

Interestingly, when participants had sufficient grades for university or college, even when they were not interested in pursuing those pathways, they still considered those options as possibilities. This is because they were still seen to be possible routes to careers during the consideration. This reinforces the finding, that the pathway choice was ultimately done in service of the aspirations *through* education.

The intrinsic aspirations for apprenticeship training indicates that the choice to pursue MAs was not made only based on instrumental rationality, or because it was the only option that the young adults could pursue. However, the intrinsic preferences were only one of the considerations, instrumental concerns were prevalent in the accounts.

The findings of the study support earlier findings on the importance of instrumental considerations, such as employability and career opportunities. The earlier studies found

these factors to be prominent especially when the young adults sought vocational education (Ryan and Lőrinc 2018; Bradley and Ingram 2013). Additionally, young people from working class backgrounds have been found to be focused on the employability and career benefits over the prestige or development of non-employment related skills and knowledge when seeking university training (Thunborg et al., 2013).

My findings suggest that instrumental concerns were prevalent in the accounts across the sample of young adults. This included a variety of natal backgrounds from parents with professional jobs achieved through university to more working-class backgrounds where at least one of the parents working in manual labour or in a trade. Thus, parental educational level did not appear to result in different levels of concern for employability when making career choices.

As outlined above, instrumental rationality was in an important role in young adults' reflexive thinking, with the instrumental benefits of the options being weighed against each other. The participants did some cost-benefit analyses and assessments of what kind of training provides the best return for especially the time invested in training.

However, unlike in some versions of the Rational Choice approach (Goldthorpe, 1998; Olssen and Peters, 2005), I did not find that instrumental rationality explained the whole decision-making process. Especially in the early part of the journeys, the instrumental rationality considerations appeared minimal in the choice of fields. In a way participants sought to include their intrinsic preferences into the decision-making process through their field of work choice whenever possible. However, instrumental rationality appeared to be central in the pathway choice. Especially as the journeys became longer and the young adults experienced precarious conditions, which is when instrumental concerns to be addressed grew in number.

Additionally, forms of the RCT theory suggest that people tend to be risk-averse, perceiving the cost of a failed attempt in a 'higher aspiration' option to be more costly overall than opting for a less risky 'lower aspiration' (Breen and Goldthorpe, 1997). In prior studies examining the role of risk perception in decision making the natal background and resources have been found to be important as the assessment of risk is conducted through the lens of both economic and cultural resources (Thunborg et al., 2013). The young adults' accounts in this study do not indicate an assessment of risk of being a major consideration, but it was present to some extent. During the first decision-making phase the MA option was seen to be

the risky option in some ways. As funding structures present in Scotland for HE cover domestic Scottish students (SAAS, 2022), university and college were not as especially risky or costly in the young adults' accounts. The only element of risk consideration expressed about the HE pathways was the concern about employability without relevant work experience. This was one of the reasons why some young adults reconsidered the choices they made in school, as they did not see sufficient employment opportunities in the field they had just began to pursue. However, the risk of not being able to find MA opportunities or get into those opportunities was a more common concern. Especially earlier in the journeys this appears to have made the college and university options relatively safe options. However, after the young adults were in employment, needing qualifications, there was no risk of ending up with 'nothing' in the short-term, and as such the risk was not relevant. This was also emphasised to young adults by some of the career advisors, who preferred if young people also had at least a college option they applied to as well, rather than risk having no destination after school.

Overall, the reasons the young adults pursued apprenticeships were related to the fit between MAs as a pathway option to 1) the aspirations the young adults sought to fulfil and 2) concerns they sought to address. Getting into an MA training became an aspiration in its own right in some young adults' accounts once they decided to pursue it, but it was an aspiration focused in the short-term, serving the long-term aspirations of good, stable careers. As such, the reasoning of the young adults matches with the policy expectations.

Unlike for some participants in the recent Aldinucci study (2021), the young adults in this study, whose aspirations were through education and training, were also planning on using routes to work that were feasible and accessible in their situations. Of course, the big difference is that in the Aldinucci study those young adults were aspiring to careers through university, rather than through the VET pathways.

Indeed, the availability of the MA opportunities did prove to be way to maintain the career aspirations for those young adults who only changed their training pathway in the second decision-making phase, rather than shifting their aspirations for a career in a different field entirely. As such, the VET pathway can maintain the capabilities of the young adults, when the influencers and structures supporting the young adults are present and help converting the aspirations into successful MA placements (Robeyns and Byskov, 2021). Examining how these conversion factors enabled the young adults to convert their capabilities into

functionings, and how the conversion factor fit the reflexive decision-making process is the focus in the following sections.

7.1.2 The role of key influencers in influencing young adults' choices in their school-to-work transition journey

This section discusses the research questions 2 and 3, which are centred on identifying the key influencers as well as how those influencers affect young adults' decision-making in the different phases of the young adults' educational journeys.

Since understanding *how* influencers influence at the different phases of the young adults' journeys is also important for understanding *who* the key influencers are in each stage, the two questions are examined together.

RQ2. Who are the key influencers to young adults and at what stages of their journeys?

RQ3. In what ways do the influencers affect young adults' decision-making about their post-compulsory education and training?

Two key findings emerged from the analysis. The first finding is that institutional influencers were a common presence in the young adults' accounts in schools and contributed to perceptions of different pathways. However, they were less commonly present when young adults chose to pursue MA training. Conversely, personal influencers appeared to grow in prominence during the post-school context as sources of information and support. The second finding is that the information about the apprenticeship pathway and opportunities – as well as the fields to some extent – was key in making the young adults consider the MA training for themselves. As the influencers and contexts differed between the two phases, each phase is discussed separately.

This section focuses on how information and influencer attitudes influenced the young adults' educational choices. However, as discussed earlier in this thesis, the influencers can also influence young adults' journeys through other actions, such as practical support. Those elements of influence and their importance as conversion factors (Robeyns and Byskov, 2021) is the focus of Section 7.1.3.

The first key decision-making phase

During the first key decision-making phase in young adults' journeys – the senior phase of secondary school – teachers, career advisors, and visiting employers appeared to play an important role in forming impressions about pathways. Parents and other personal influencers

appeared to also contribute in 8 young adults' journeys, but their role was less clear in the other accounts.

My findings indicate that the educational field, and specifically information and narratives contained in it, had an important role in forming young adults' thoughts and impressions about the pathway options. In contrast to the pathway choices, fields of work appeared to be chosen relatively independently by the young adults or they were discussed with personal influencers. Exposure to potential fields of interest appears to have originated both from school and from personal influencers.

The most common way an influencer affected young adults' choices was through provision of information. The provided information was influential when it affected the attitudes of young adults towards possible career or pathway options, made the young adults aware of options, or provided the required information to pursue the options. As such influential information enabled young adults to think reflexively about their options.

Most of the information used in pathway choice appeared to originate from schools or from resources that the young adults found through school. However, it is noteworthy that the personal influencers especially at home were generally reinforcing the attitudes and information present in schools. As such both groups of influencers worked in concert between the two fields (education and home).

Regarding the pathway choices, guidance from advisors and teachers on the fit of different pathways to young adults' aspirations appeared to be very influential at this stage. In some instances, young adults followed the guidance – especially from career advisors – even when they were intrinsically interested in different pathway. This suggests that the CIAG arrangements and implementation present in the school environment has the potential to strongly influence young adults' educational choices, as the Scottish CIAG strategy expects (Scottish Government, 2020, 2014a).

Young adults also used information from narratives and the way different pathway options were presented to form impressions of the different options. These impressions of the relative worth and value of different pathway options, as well as cues for what kind of person should apply for each pathway, were used to interpret a 'hierarchy of options' by the young adults. Teachers and visiting employers (as well learning institution representatives in events such as career fairs) had a prominent role in creating the dominant discourses, which contributed to

the interpreted hierarchies. The specific role of DYW's partnership activities (including the employer visits) is discussed in section 7.1.4.

As the discourses and attitudes conveyed by influencers were reproducing the pre-existing ideas about the pathways in the society – which the DYW policy aimed to change over time (Scottish Government, 2014a) – the influencers were exerting a morphostatic effect on the young adults' choices in this instance (Archer 2007). This is contrary to the morphogenetic aim of the policies governing the CIAG and transition, which seek to flatten the perceived hierarchy of the pathway options in favour of the young adults seeking a pathway into careers that suits them best (Scottish Government, 2018, 2014a).

The perception of apprenticeships, and MA specifically, as a less valuable option compared to university and college pathways appears was fostered through two factors enacted by the influencers. 1) Those who did well at school were steered towards university or college education, and 2) as part of this steering, university and college options were the most prevalent options in career events and employer visits. As such, the perceived targeting and prominence reinforced the idea of university as the 'best' option for those that are successful. In contrast, apprenticeships being seen as the route to manual labour jobs, the option for those who leave school early, and for those that do not do well in school.

The perceptions of apprenticeships and the vocational route to work outlined above are common from other studies in liberal economies, like England, where the prestige of apprenticeships is low compared to the academic route options (Brockmann and Laurie, 2016b; Raffe et al., 2001b; Ryan and Lőrinc, 2018). Perception is also present in other types of skills systems, such as in the relatively statist system in Finland, where the perceptions of pathways as learning vs doing and the doxa understanding of what kinds of people are suited for each pathway was found to be affecting educational choices (Brunila et al., 2011).

Before moving on to discuss personal influencers' role in the first key decision-making phase, it is worth noting that gender was an important factor in how the pathway options were perceived as well. However, the role of gender in how the information was perceived by young adults is discussed further in section 7.1.4. This is because the effect of gender appeared to be most prominent when the young adults were assimilating information they received from different employers that were a part of the partnership activities in DYW strategy.

Institutional influencers were not the only ones contributing to these negative impressions of the apprenticeship pathway. Peers in school appeared to reinforce the impression that apprenticeships were not desirable. Since the young adults' peers and friends were making choices that conformed to the perceived hierarchy, the impressions were strengthened. The importance of peers in influencing career choices has also been found in earlier studies. Studies for example noted that peers signalled to each other which pathway options were feasible Brooks (2003) and that peers can influence significant choices like subject choices through their educational journeys (D'Angelo and Dollinger, 2021). This study reinforces the importance of peers in school, but while peers appear to reinforce pathway choice perceptions, they did not appear to attribute those as the only source for them.

Likewise, parents and other relatives also contributed to the perceptions that the young adults had about the pathway options. These were generally reinforcing the hierarchy that the young adults inferred in schools. The only exceptions to this were when a personal influencer had done an apprenticeship themselves. In those instances, the home field was providing a counter-narrative to the one that was present in school. The importance of the home field was not only evident in the young adults' accounts. It was also noted by the career advisors. All this adds to the findings of earlier studies, where the parents and other close relatives were important influencers in career choices (Brunila et al., 2011; D'Angelo and Dollinger, 2021; Hegna and Smette, 2017; Seghers et al., 2019).

Personal influencers also played an important role in exposing young adults to different career opportunities. The social capital contained in their social networks enabled them to connect to people who could tell them about different jobs, or even help them get a job experience placement to try the job themselves. The importance of these connections was recognised by career advisors. In their practice, the advisors attempted to make young adults leverage those resources from their social networks in order to maximise their relevant information and work experience. This served to not only inform the young adults about their options, but to maximise their chances of getting into their desired careers.

Before moving on to the second key decision-making phase, it is worth noting that the content of the information did not completely dictate whether it became influential. The types of information and the messengers of the information were also important, reflecting findings from (Ball and Vincent, 1998; Slack et al., 2014). The information provided to the young adults in the school environment, despite being mostly from institutional 'official' actors, was a mixture of 'cold' and 'hot/warm' information (Ball and Vincent 1998; Slack et al. 2014).

However, information classified as ‘hot’ or ‘warm’ information – 1st or 2nd hand information from one’s social network or otherwise relatable people – appeared be most influential alongside personal experiences, reflecting the earlier findings (Ball and Vincent, 1998; Slack et al., 2014).

The baseline information about the theoretically available pathways was ‘cold’ information and all young adults were aware of the pathways. However, it did not influence the young adults to pursue any of the pathways and its function was limited to ensuring that the young adults were aware of the options. The career advisors also appeared to provide broader information about MAs that went against the common perception of apprenticeships. For example, mentioning the number of available MA framework. However, in the young adults’ accounts this ‘cold’ information alone was not sufficient in making the young adults pursue MA options in school. The most effective ‘cold’ information appeared to be job advertisements, which the young adults used often in their searches and were thankful to receive from the advisors. However, this was often used more after leaving school and in conjunction with hot and warm information.

The second key decision-making phase

The second key decision-making phase occurred in contexts outside the school field. These included 1) being in further education, 2) being in employment but seeking something new, or 3) being unemployed.

Reflexive choices were made both regarding the field of work and the pathway into the field, much like in the first phase. However, many participants also showed continuities in the field of work element. Once the young adult participants were enacting their choices from the first key decision-making phase, they reflected on whether the trajectory suited them. If they were happy with the choices, they focused on completing their planned pathway and the second key decision-making phase occurred when the planned training was finished. If something about their earlier choice did not feel right, they appeared to stop their training. This was followed by finding ‘placeholder’ employment to keep themselves going economically and reflecting on the next steps.

While most young adults made the choice to not complete their training towards the beginning of their studies, one participant made the choice when they were almost finished after they faced a barrier that made them reconsider their path. This reflected findings from an earlier study indicating that it did not matter to young adults whether they changed their

plans in the early or later stages of their educational programs if they felt that the cost – whether financial, time, or effort – was not worth the potential output (Hodkinson and Bloomer, 2001). Thus, the reflexive decision-making began at the point they were considering dropping out, even if they did not have any firm ideas about their next stages at that point.

The role of influencers grew again as young adults were seeking information and/or advice. Participants utilised influencers when deciding on what kinds of career opportunities to pursue, which pathways to take into those careers, and they used influencers to find specific apprenticeship opportunities. As such, the information and support that the young adults sought was similar to the first phase. However, a notable difference was the emphasis on finding information about apprenticeship experiences and apprenticeship opportunities.

The most notable difference from the first key decision-making phase is the prominent role of personal influencers, especially as information sources. Indeed, participants with the required information and resources contained in their social networks did not seek outside institutional support at this stage. These differences in structurally allocated resources used in decision-making have been found to be influential in whether to pursue HE as well as in being influential in university choices (e.g. Akram 2013; Atkinson 2010; Slack et al. 2014). This study adds to those findings, as young adults pursuing VET options appear to leverage their resources similarly in successful transitions to MA training.

Both friends and family were notable groups of personal influencers in the young adults' accounts. The first group of influencers was usually providing important information about MAs and apprenticeships, while the latter group provided information used in both pathway choices and field choices. Important institutional influencers at this stage are discussed after the personal influencers.

Friends and peers became prominent when they had first hand-experience of apprenticeships or working in the young adult's target field of work and the peers acted almost always as a source of information rather than as confidantes with whom the participants discussed whether something is a good idea to pursue. This is a good example of an influencer with 'hot' information (Ball and Vincent, 1998; Slack et al., 2014) becoming influential in the accounts. The young adults appeared to consult friends for information when they exhibited the usage of the autonomous or meta-reflexive reflexive modes in their journeys, where the decision-making was driven independently and mostly internally.

Similarly to the first decision-making phase, parents and relatives were used to learn more about different careers. However, the role that the parents had in providing this information was more explicit in the young adults' accounts at this stage. A possible reason for the prominence of parents in the accounts is that four young adults began to look towards careers that at least one of their parents was involved in after their initial transition attempts did not bear fruit or if they were not fully committed to a field of work after school.

Expressions of support from close personal influencers appeared to also be an important form of influence at this second phase. This role of the family environment has also been highlighted by Hegna and Smette (2017). As in their study, the feeling of being supported by parents in choices did not appear to vary in the accounts despite different natal contexts. However, the difference in natal contexts was limited to socioeconomic differences rather than minority and majority backgrounds in this study. In some instances, the family influencers expressed attitudes towards pathway options that reinforced the narratives at school. Specifically, the narratives about the HE option being the best option for good careers was reinforced in three journeys. In the past studies strong parental attitudes towards options in career choices pose a threat to the young adults' agency, as they might not wish to risk their relationship with their parents (Hegna and Smette, 2017). As such, the home field can restrict young adults' willingness to exert their agency. However, the accounts in this study did not suggest that the young adults faced such a threat. In fact, even after expressing their preference for a specific pathway the parents also expressed support for whatever pathway their child wished to pursue.

Institutional influencers, as stated earlier, were approached by the young adults when they sought some specific information or support. Five young adults had institutional influencers in a key role during the second phase. In contrast to the first key decision-making phase, the institutional influencers had to be either sought out by the young adults – if they felt that their closest personal social connections did not have the information and resources that they needed – or they were brought into an institutional influencer sphere as part of the application process for MAs. The latter way is how the young adults encountered training providers as an institution, which had an important role in supporting the successful transitions. In addition to providing a way to structure the application process and supporting the young adults in it – which are discussed further in 7.1.3. – the training providers were an important source of information about possible MA opportunities.

Institutional influencers tended to act primarily as a source of information and support for the execution of applications after the young adults had already decided to pursue some specific field. The only exceptions to this were the two journeys, by William and Fran, where they also discussed the suitability of the different career options relatively extensively with a youth employability worker and an employer recruiter respectively. In both instances, the influencers were able to provide expert advice on how to enter the field of work that the participants were interested in and could link them to a specific MA opportunity. This latter factor was a commonality in all journeys where institutional influencers became influential during the second phase.

Factors contributing to a person becoming a key influencer

This part of the discussion examines three different factors that appeared to affect whether a person became a key influencer.

One of the important determining factors whether a person became a key influencer in the eyes of the young adults appeared to be tied to utility of the information as well as to the relationship between the influencer and the young adult. Influencers with the information that the young adults needed – especially if it was 'hot' or 'warm' information appeared to become the key influencers in the young adults' accounts. A 'higher' socioeconomic position or closer relationship with the young adult was not necessarily enough to be a key influencer during the young adults' journeys. Instead, the information or the resources the influencer possessed had to be relevant to the young adults' concerns and related to their aspirations either *through* or *for* education-and training. The social relationship, which connects to the 'hot' and 'warm' information (Ball and Vincent, 1998; Slack et al., 2014), was relevant in both decision-making phases. However, it was during the second phase the young adults appeared to be more active in seeking out people who could provide 'hot' and 'warm' information. The 1st and 2nd hand accounts provided the young adults with the confidence that they can do the apprenticeship as well as that it leads into a qualification and career potential that they desired.

Another important factor affecting which influencers became key influencers in the journeys was the structural context, or the fields that the young adults lived in as they made their choices. It affected which influencers were present and most accessible. This appeared to be one of the reasons why personal influencers became more prominent as the journeys became longer. Institutional influencers could still become important, but the young adults would

have to seek them out themselves in many instances. As multiple people can have the information that the young adults are looking for, the accessibility of those potential influencers appears to be important.

Finally, the young adults' reflexive decision-making modes could result in the elevation of specific people as key influencers. If the young adults included influencers into their communicative reflexivity, those influencers became prominent in the accounts. Participants who utilised the communicative reflexive at this stage (Archer, 2012, 2007, 2003; Baker, 2019), had close family members as at least one of the important influencers in all instances. Only two participants engaged in communicative reflexivity with people outside their families and in both of those journeys' family members were also part of the reflexive process. In the two instances where institutional influencers took part in the communicative reflexivity, they also became key influencers in the young adults' accounts.

However, communicative reflexivity appeared to be used alongside the other forms of reflexivity in the young adults' accounts instead of being the sole mode of reflexivity. Multiple modes of reflexivity has also been found in earlier studies by Baker, Dyke and colleagues, as well as Bovill (Baker, 2019; Bovill, 2012; Dyke et al., 2012). In the study by Baker the use of communicative reflexive was connected to navigating barriers and challenges that the young adults could not bypass on their own (Baker, 2019). This study's findings support the notion that reflexivity usage was an adaptable response to challenges. The usage of communicative reflexive increased after the young adults had to readjust their plans and choices in their journeys when they faced challenges that they needed or wanted external help to resolve. While the participants accounts did not necessarily indicate that they sought to navigate past a defined impassable barrier, the usage of communicative reflexive appeared to increase during times of insecurity and indecisiveness. This suggests that personal influencers, as well as some institutional influencers, can become key influencers in such circumstances.

7.1.3. Influencers supporting and enabling the enactment of career choices

This section discusses RQ4 by examining the different transition behaviours, the role of influencers in supporting the young adults through the transition and how they potentially foster specific transition behaviours.

RQ 4: How do institutional influencers support and influence young adults when planning and executing an approach to pursue post-school pathway choices?

The decision-making process did not end when the young adults had their initial plan to pursue a pathway. That step is followed by a plan to fulfil the pathway choice (including where to find MA opportunities to apply for) and the enactment of the choices into practice. If the latter two phases turned out to be challenging, the young adults could begin to doubt their choice and consider other avenues.

Influencers played an important role in providing structure to the MA opportunity search and in providing practical support in the application process. Indeed, influencers have been assigned responsibilities to ensure a successful transition in the Scottish skills system. Evans' (2007) research into different 'transition behaviours' (2007, p.86) were used in the analysis to systematically examine the way the transition was enacted into action. The behaviours that Evans outlines are 'strategic', 'taking chances', 'step-by-step' and 'wait and see'. These were also discussed in Chapter 5. I argue in the discussion below, that the institutional influencers' support shapes how the young adults approach their transitions. This was most visible in the first key decision-making phase where the influencers sought to make young adults approach the transition in a systematic fashion, encouraging the strategic behaviours where possible. This also involved providing resources, such as My World of Work, which the young adults could use to really inform themselves about the options and resources available to them. When the young adults did not have institutional influencers as part of their journey, the approaches became more reactive, reflected as an increase in 'taking chances' approach. Alternatively they tried to establish themselves gradually into new paths through step by step approach. These approaches appear to be led predominantly by the young adults themselves, rather than personal influencers guiding the transitions like institutional influencers often appeared to do.

The strategic and the step-by-step approaches were the most prevalent approaches in the young adults' accounts during the first key decision-making phase. One reason for the prevalence of the two approaches appears to be the guidance from the institutional influencer actors as well as the structure set up to govern the transition from school to the next stage of the young adults' journeys. The influencers who took part in creating a structure for the decision-making included career advisors and guidance/pastoral teachers.

These actors created plans with the young adults to ensure that they have an approach to follow and some destination in mind. It is worth noting that every young adult did not leave school with an idea of a place to apply or a plan to follow. Still, majority of the young adults

in the study did have at least a short-term plan to reach the next stage and a general sense of where they wanted to get to, which is indicative of the step-by-step approach.

The participants who had a strong interest towards a field had more detailed planned steps for achieving them. This appeared to be the case whether the plan involved pursuing MA, college, or university. Participants who did not have a clear idea of the kind of job they wanted to do appeared to utilise a step-by-step approach both in school and after school. As they targeted a more general field of work like 'business', rather than specific roles in the field, the focus was getting through the required educational steps to find more interesting opportunities in the future. The most passive 'wait-and-see' approach was used by three participants during the first key decision-making phase. It appeared to be used as a holding pattern approach to give themselves time to figure out their next steps. In two instances this was a short-term state to gain some work experience before making a choice, while for one person the extent of the 'wait and see' approach was initially indefinite before opportunities they valued and felt capable of pursuing arose.

The career advisor accounts indicated that they attempted to make the young adults think about their career decisions in a more systematic fashion, reflecting the findings from the young adults' accounts of their decision-making.

Support for the transitions did not end at the first key decision-making phase. However, the influencers providing support changed, as was discussed in section 7.1.2. In the more varied contexts during the second key phase the influencers were more varied. Most participants had parents or siblings in the support role, but as noted earlier, institutional influencers were also involved in some journeys. Common institutional influencers in the accounts were training providers, who helped young adults find apprenticeship opportunities and to apply to them successfully.

Institutional influencers helped find opportunities by conducting their own searches for opportunities alongside the young adults (especially training providers, recruiter) and would help in the practical matters of applications, such as crafting of CVs (career advisors, recruiters and employability support workers). Therefore, the focus was mostly on the practical execution of choices and suggesting opportunities to the young adults, rather than involving themselves heavily in young adults' transition behaviours. Career advisors provided more coaching based support, seeking to provide tools and approaches to finding

opportunities, but the other support was centred on aiding the young adults by fulfilling part of the function for them.

The emphasis in the support was on getting the young adults into MA training, so that they are better positioned to plan the next steps after acquiring more work experience and qualifications. Therefore, the support was encouraging behaviours similar to the step-by-step approach, with focus on getting to the next level of qualification while remaining open to changes in future.

The less systematic approaches to decision-making appeared to be more susceptible or reliant on serendipity in the journeys. The role of serendipity (Atkins, 2017; Avis and Atkins, 2017) was important in especially the longer lasting wait-and see approach, the taking chances approach, and the step-by-step approach to some extent. This appeared to be partially due to the way the young adults discovered potential MA opportunities that they ended up pursuing. Participants who had planned their journey around potential MA opportunities (utilising strategic approach) had backup plans involving e.g. college in case those opportunities did not arise. As such, they were not reliant on serendipity to the same extent as those adopting the taking chances and wait-and-see approaches especially.

The role of serendipity also grew in the out-of-school contexts where the common information base and institutional influencers guiding the participants to information sources was missing among the participants. Susan's accidental encounter of important information regarding MAs as a pathway to her desired field is a great example of this, since she learned of the information in a casual conversation at a workplace instead of systematically seeking MA opportunities on her own as part of a plan. However, unlike in Atkins' study (2017) the serendipity was not found to be systematically more important in participant journeys who were in less advantageous positions. For example, Susan was in the most advantageous position out of all the participant in regard to her qualification and she was in a position of economic stability at the time. Instead, serendipity appears to be important when the key information enabling the decision-making is not contained in the social and cultural capitals contained by the participant. In those instances, the young adults adopted approaches that were more open for different opportunities (taking chances, step-by-step).

It is worth noting that the support offered in the first decision-making stage is potentially even more involved and has a potential to influence the transition behaviours more than what was evident in the young adults' accounts. The support from career advisors, especially if the

young adults are allocated to the high tier of career service, focuses on fostering the capabilities of the young adults to make educational choices. The process involves helping young adults be systematic about information search, understanding themselves better, and knowing how to utilise various resources. This highlights the importance of career skills and their long-term usage after school as the Scottish policy (Skills Development Scotland, 2012, 2012) envisions. Additionally, earlier studies have suggested that these skills are very important for successful career decision-making (D'Angelo and Dollinger, 2021; Galliott and Graham, 2015). However, as the support for developing skills and capabilities for career management is the most 'targeted' element, i.e., aimed for those who are deemed to need the support most, this means that not everyone experiences the support. While this targeting ensures focus of resources to those who need the support most, it can potentially result in some people that would benefit from the support not receiving it.

This study suggests that while the assumption holds in some ways – the young adults utilised many of the approaches contained in the CMS approach – the young adults' skills in searching for knowledge and informing themselves is lacking in some areas. As discussed earlier in this thesis, some of the young adults just applied for something that seemed 'good enough' as they had not developed firm preferences, or they applied for something just because they assumed that they would get employed in that area. These emerged as motivations that the career advisors sought to discourage as the main drivers of career choices while in school.

Similarly, the young adults were not as active in searching information on their own as the policies appear to assume. For example, career advisors had the My World of Work portal in a central role in supporting young adults, but it was not evident in the young adults' accounts. No young adults in the study reported utilising it on their own in decision-making. This appears to have left information gaps, such as knowing about MA opportunities to field of business. This suggests that young adults appear to know what they want to do – they have a targeted field, a plan to reach it, and so on – but are not fully informed about their options and do not necessarily want to even pursue the options that they chose. This appears to increase the likelihood of stopping their training before it is done and returning to the decision-making process, but without the institutional support in the second phase. As such, it is also a gap in the target of the DYW strategy's approach to provide better information, as the young adults do not necessarily utilise it.

7.1.4 The influencing effects of the enactment of DYW policy elements

I have already discussed how influencers might affect young adults' choices in section 7.1.2. However, this section focuses on how the DYW strategy's partnership approaches and established structures appeared influence young adults' decision-making especially as it relates to MA training. The discussion is centred on RQ5. The discussion expands on the earlier sections and draws from both Chapter 5 and 6 findings.

RQ 5: How are the DYW strategy elements, such as the partnership activities in schools – including the reformed apprenticeships pathway – influencing young adults' choices to pursue Modern Apprenticeships?

I argue that the effects of the partnership activities are mixed. While the activities appear fulfil the aim of introducing more varied career paths to the young adults in school – and in some ways expand the number of opportunities that the young adults have in experiencing different jobs – the way the policy is implemented in schools appears to also enable unintended effects. The main unintended effect is the potential reinforcement of the perception of apprenticeships as routes to a narrow range of jobs consisting predominantly of manual labour jobs and the potential perception of apprenticeships being for men rather than both men and women. These perceptions add to the barriers of entering MA training.

The DYW strategy and CIAG policies set up the aims regarding career skills and transitions. The policies also contain approaches to reach the aims and the set of responsibilities assigned for different groups of actors. For the purposes of this research question and the study overall, the key elements consist of the support that the young adults receive during their transition from school to the next phase of education and training. As discussed in Chapter 6, the key element in the DYW is to support young adults' decision-making and to help them make their own choices (Scottish Government, 2014a). This is a core element of the strategy, and it was also by the policy experts interviewed for the study. Therefore, the aim of the support and the partnership activities with the employers is not to push the young adults towards any specific pathway or a field. This is not the goal despite the stated aim of the DYW strategy to increase the number of MA starts to 30,000 (Scottish Government, 2014a). Instead, the assumption appears to be that the MA starts at the start of the policy are lower than they should be, and young adults better informed of the opportunities within the pathway would naturally raise the start numbers. Therefore, the aim appears to be to adjust the perception of the MAs as a less useful qualification than university or college qualification through information. The

impression, which has been found in different studies in the UK (Raffe et al., 2001b; Ryan and Lőrinc, 2018) was also present in the accounts of the young adults and noted by both the policy experts and the career advisors. As such, the findings indicate there is still work to be done in that area.

The effects of low-level partnership activities shaping available information for the first key decision-making phase

The majority of partnership activities between schools and employers were what the experts called 'low intensity' or 'low level' partnership activities. They were marked by relatively low minimum commitment to carry out successfully and tended not to involve long-term arrangements over a semester for example.

Activities that are short-term and less intensive consisted predominantly of information provision about the company, the job, and routes into employment. This fulfils a role that Galliot and Graham have advocated for career services in Australia (Galliott and Graham, 2015). Their study found that schools which offered work experience placements and career training had fewer 'career uncertain' students and subsequently appeared to have a better career choice capability as well as having higher levels of school enjoyment (Galliott and Graham, 2015). The kinds of activities called for by Galliot and Graham start early in the Scottish context, as they are meant to occur from primary school onward.

However, in practice the frequency and intensity of the activities increased towards the senior phase of secondary school. The purpose of the activities is at least partially to expose young adults to a wider range of careers in schools. The early onset of the activities allows, in theory, the young people to make their subject choices with careers in mind. However, the accounts of the young adults in this study indicated that they did not do that, at least not consciously. Instead, most participants made their career choices in the last two years of secondary school. As such, the young adults should have been exposed to numerous careers before the choices are made.

While actors like career advisors were presenting neutral information and advice that would maximise the young adults' chances to reach their aspired careers, employer influencers had a different role. The positionality of recruiters was to present their employer in a positive light to attract future employees and to promote training opportunities such as MAs for the young people in the company. This results in a fundamentally different position for the influencers in recruiter role compared to the other institutional influencers discussed in this thesis.

The position of employer representatives in schools was to benefit the company, but from the policy perspective their activity benefited the collective information environment as it exposed the young adults to different jobs and fields of work. Thus, the two incentive structures can co-exist in the school environment and fulfil the aims of both the employers and the Scottish Government.

MAs were not necessarily the apprenticeships promoted by these company representatives in the different contexts. However, the promotion of the other apprenticeship opportunities had the potential to increase interest towards MAs. This was seen clearly in one participant's journey as they became more interested in pursuing the available MA opportunity when they learned of the possibility to do a higher-level Graduate Apprenticeship (GA) in the future. The extension of the apprenticeship pathway to include degree level training while working (which the GA does) can make the whole pathway more attractive. It also made the employer more attractive to the young adults, as it promised opportunities to progress.

The raising of the potential ceiling of qualifications achievable via the apprenticeship route increased the prestige of the whole pathway in the eyes of the young adult. However, the effect was limited, and the information was found outside the common school environment. As such, the introduction of such elements alone is not enough to create parity between apprenticeships and the other pathways.

The potential negative effects of the partnership activity implementation

While the early introduction of the career activities in schools is good in theory, potentially allowing the young adults to consider a wider range of careers, my findings indicate that the partnership activities are not without their problems. The most important unintended consequence of these low-level partnership activities is the potential presentation of MAs as a route for boys to get into manual labour. The effect was not always so stark, and not only resulting from the partnership activities. However, partnership activities contributed to this perception.

Specifically, the effect appears to stem from the career opportunities to which MAs are linked. None of this is to say that jobs like construction worker and nursery worker should not be presented through MAs. However, MAs should be shown to be an option to fields beyond 'traditional apprenticeship fields' to reflect the potential opportunities.

The element of gender in how the opportunities were perceived is worth noting. There were some elements about the partnership activities that both genders reacted to in similar ways.

Neither young women or young men in the sample appeared to consider fields that were stereotyped to be for the 'opposite gender'. A good example of this is career childcare, which was seen as a career for women and men interested disinterest towards those opportunities. Similar findings were found by Myklebust, who found that boys were more discouraged to enter female dominated fields than other way around (Myklebust, 2019). Other studies have also shown that career choices are made through a lens of gender (van der Vleuten et al., 2016). The van der Vleuten study specifically found that young men were more likely to have subject preferences that conformed to gender stereotypes. In the current study young women appeared to be disinterested in fields stereotyped to be 'for men' much like men were not interested in fields stereotyped to be 'for women'. Most of the participants in the sample sought a career in business and management related field, which has in relative terms more balanced gender divide and one where the gap was reducing (Skills Development Scotland, 2022a).

However, there were also differences. The young women in the sample were more likely to reflect their pathway choices explicitly through gender. Two participant accounts indicated that they saw MAs in general aimed towards men. The mismatch in fit between self-perception – a young woman with aspirations to good careers – and perception of apprenticeships as route to manual labour jobs aimed at men discouraged them from considering it as an option for themselves. This appears to have been one reason why they did not investigate MA was a potential route to their preferred careers while they were in schools. In that sense, the created perceptions formed a 'soft boundary' that restricted the young adults' choices. While it did not act as an impassable barrier, and did not bind young adults' agency as some of the other barriers Evans (2002) discussed in her research, the perception excluded from investigated consideration until specific opportunities countering that perception emerged.

This finding about gendered representation and how it can form taken for granted generalised perceptions also reflects findings from a study by Brunila and colleagues. They found that young people's the choices are affected by "taken for granted backdrop" (Brunila et al. 2011, p. 320). These backdrops of norms and taken for granted understandings of subject areas and pathways suited for people from given backgrounds, such as being from a certain gender.

The gender division in fields of work – especially in apprenticeships – is an issue that the Scottish policymakers have tried to address. However, as the SDS report (Skills Development Scotland, 2022a) shows, overall more MA frameworks had at least 75:25 ratio in gender

balance than not 2020/21 academic year. The work-based learning route is overrepresented by males in most fields, and the HE route is overrepresented by females. This means that the MA frameworks reflect an overall trend in Scotland.

My findings suggest that the usage of male dominated fields to represent the bulk of the MA offering to young adults in school risks representing the whole apprenticeships pathway in a gendered way, even beyond the fields that are used to represent the pathway option.

The reasons for the rather limited showcasing of MA routes to careers is not clear from the data. However, both the career advisor and the policy expert interviews indicated that actors in schools have a substantial amount of discretion in deciding the activity partners. As such, some measures to ensure that the schools have ability to address the issue of representation appear to be required.

The effects of intense partnership activities

The more intense partnership activities are less common than the low-level 'transactional' activities. However, these activities are also important and are potentially very influential in the young adults' decision-making. These intense partnership activities allow the young adults get to experience the work settings and practices in person. In policy this is assumed to both inform their decision-making as well as developing skills that ready them for employment. The latter element was also emphasised by the relevant policy experts in the partnership activities.

Personal experiences of apprenticeships (through Foundation Apprenticeship activities) in a cohort of young adults should result in more positive view of apprenticeships generally, if the policy assumption about the lack of good information about apprenticeships is true. As discussed in Section 7.1.2 and in earlier Chapters, the experience of fields first hand does not only benefit the person doing it. The young adults discussed their experiences and opportunities with peers and friends, which is potentially very influential form of information. Both earlier studies (Ball and Vincent 1998; Hegna and Smette 2017; Slack et al. 2014) and this study support the idea that information from personal social networks and from relatable peers can be influential in decision-making.

Additionally, the effectiveness of the information is not just limited to the first key decision-making phase. As discussed in Chapter 5, the young adults consulted their peers during the second key decision-making phase as they sought more information about apprenticeships and work-based learning. As such, the information could influence choices of young people

even after school through influence exerted by people who experienced Foundation Apprenticeships.

It is also worth noting that while the above discussion focused on apprenticeship experience, this would also apply to information about working in a specific field, since the young adults also consulted their peers' experiences in that regard.

In conclusion, my study suggests that the partnership activities expose young adults to a wider range of fields and career opportunities, which fulfils the aims of the DYW strategy (Scottish Government, 2014a). This can affect career choices directly, as witnessed or experienced careers can be interesting enough for the young adults to pursue themselves. Those activities can also contribute to young adults' discussion with their peers about their experiences, which have been found to be prominent form of influential information in this study and in earlier studies (Ball and Vincent 1998; Hegna and Smette 2017; Slack et al. 2014). Finally, I argue that the partnership activities can potentially have an unintended negative effect on the perceptions of the MA pathway, especially for women. This effect appears to emerge from the way the pathway is represented mostly through fields that consist of manual labour or are stereotyped to be for men.

7.1.5. Summary of key original contribution

This study has examined young adults' educational decision-making and how different influencers affect that decision-making process. My findings contribute to various topics examined in earlier studies. These include:

- Understanding how young adults pursued MA training for variety of reasons, both intrinsic and instrumental, and how the context in which they made their decisions affected the concerns that they tried to address through their choice to pursue VET training (Fuller and Macfadyen, 2012; Pantea, 2020).
- Providing evidence on how reflexive decision-making modes are adaptive approaches used to address challenges, especially through communicative reflexivity, when young adults' journeys are disrupted (Baker, 2019; Dyke et al., 2012).
- Which influencers play a role of key influencers in a variety of young adults' journeys. My research found that the presence of institutional influencers became smaller as the journeys became longer, which led to personal influencers gaining prominence in the journeys.

- The forms of influence were mostly based on: 1) providing information (either 'neutral' or 1st and 2nd hand) which contributed to the formation of pathway impressions and made young people aware of different choices, 2) providing support that enabled young adults to pursue their aspired careers and forms of training, and 3) taking part in communicative reflexivity process.
- Development of an analytical framework that synthesises Archer's Critical Realist approach, the Capabilities approach, as well as Bourdesian perspectives. This framework contributes to the conceptual field on how actors shape structures, the morphogenetic process, and how the interaction between macro and micro levels, reflexive decision-making, and influencers all contribute to decision-making. The approach also contributes to the techniques used in qualitative analysis of adults' educational decision-making.

As such, this study provides an original contribution especially on understanding how influencers affect young adults' choices through various activities conducted by influencers. These findings are especially relevant to liberal skills systems where higher education is the 'default' option that young adults pursue for careers. The emphasis in the contributions is on the effects of influencers on pathway choices.

Earlier research on institutional influencers has found that for example teachers' attitudes can affect the aspirations young people might have (Polesel et al., 2018), and career advisors contribute to the vocational orientation of young people (Kamm et al., 2020). The latter topic has been examined through influencers' effects young adults' preferences of fields and pathways into careers in this study. This study adds to the earlier understanding by elaborating on how employers in school context contribute to the mix of influences, and how these elements reinforce each other in some ways.

One of the key contributions of this study is providing a view of how different activities by various influencers Scottish schools (and homes) together contribute to the reproduction of the stereotypical view of apprenticeships as less valuable pathway to work. This stereotypical view has been found in the UK in earlier studies (Raffe et al., 2001b) and recognised in Scottish reviews of the system (Scottish Government, 2018).

The contributing elements include the relative space and visibility provided for each option across CIAG activities (including teachers outlining routes to careers in their subject areas), as well as the kinds of employers used to showcase the different pathways. These activities,

whose intent in Scottish policy is to show more careers to young adults (Scottish Government, 2014a), contribute to the view that apprenticeships are a route to manual labour and in some cases resulted in a view that the pathway is targeted specifically towards men.

This study also brings focus on the relative influence of hot and warm information (Slack et al., 2014) about careers that young adults receive in their school field, and how it is used in reflexive decision-making. 'Cold' information (Slack et al., 2014) also played an important role in informing young adults about the basics, but the hot and warm information appeared to be more influential in forming impressions of pathways and convincing young adults to consider an option.

Therefore, this study contributes to the understanding of young adults' career decision-making in various ways. However, it especially adds to the understanding of the ways through which different influencers affect the journeys into apprenticeship training.

7.2 Implications for policy and practice

This section examines the implications that this study's findings have for policy and practice in supporting young adults' transition from school to work, especially journeys into apprenticeships training.

The first implication is related the persistent negative attitudes towards apprenticeships training in schools. This study identified various factors that contribute to the perceptions, and this section outlines some actors that could help address them.

The second implication is related to the complexity of young adults' journeys, and on the need to ensure that young adults have the tools to develop career skills needed in the potentially complex transitions. Ensuring young adults' engagement with the self-use resources and targeting of the career advisor coaching play an important role in this.

7.2.1 Persisting attitudes towards apprenticeships

My findings suggest that overall, the apprenticeships pathway is still being valued less highly than college and university pathways in school environments and institutional cultures. While the negative attitude towards apprenticeships was not universal, many young adults experienced the negative discourses of MAs in school. These messages were interpreted through a lens of self-perception, as found in earlier studies (Brunila et al., 2011). Therefore, those who saw themselves as well-performing pupils appear to have formed these

impressions more readily. Career advisors accounts suggested that attitudes towards apprenticeships can vary both between schools and within schools as teachers and staff differ in their attitudes. This suggests that negative perceptions of apprenticeships persist in many schools around Scotland.

This issue was already identified in the Learner Journey Review (Scottish Government, 2018) and my research adds insight into the specific forms of influence that contribute to the formation of those attitudes and perceptions.

As discussed further in Chapters 5 and 6, as well as Sections 7.1.2 and 7.1.4, the perceptions appear to emerge from the way pathways are presented to the young adults by various influencers. The most prominent influencers affecting the perceptions appear to be teachers, the selection of employer representatives who present routes to work through DYW partnership activities, and parents in some journeys. Career advisors also reflected especially on the effects of parental attitudes and knowledge on pathway perceptions.

The role of teachers is connected to the narratives created about the pathways through their everyday teaching activities, as well as the prioritisation of the university pathway in the common support activities. The commonly found emphasis of university option in both elements was one of the ways these perceptions were formed.

The negative impression of MAs was also not limited to 'high performing' schools or into one region. Instead, the participant accounts indicated that schools across Scotland – including greater Glasgow area, Ayrshire, Edinburgh region, Scottish Borders, and Aberdeenshire – showed prioritisation of the university pathway over others. This meant that MA option was seen to be aimed those that could not make it to university or college. My findings suggest that more work needs to be done to inform especially teachers about the apprenticeship pathway opportunities and to try and ensure more equal presence of the pathway options in schools.

The effect of the DYW partnership activities appeared to stem from schools mostly demonstrating MA opportunities with examples of manual labour jobs in male-dominated fields. This contributes to the perception that apprenticeships are 'for men' and 'for those that do not do well academically'. In addition to being focused on specific careers, the career journeys showing MA routes were less common than examples of university routes to careers. The combined effect of both limited range and amount of MA visibility appears to have contributed to the negative impressions.

As discussed in Chapter 6, schools form these partnership activities, which suggests that schools can potentially address the issue through a wider range of visible pathway options to different careers. This requires that each school has access to employer representatives who can provide such examples. As such, there are potentially some things that those entities facilitating the partnerships, including the SDS and the regional DYW groups, can do to help the schools with the issue. For example, the usage of online 'marketplaces' for partnership opportunities, outlined in Chapter 6, help engage with employers further away and show those apprenticeship examples in different regions.

7.2.2 Complex school-to-work journeys and importance of career skills

Journeys of the young adult participants in the study demonstrate well that the road from school to can be complex and involve several pathways. The transition from school to the next step is important in the DYW strategy governing the transition (Scottish Government, 2014a). The focus on that phase is understandable, since bridging the gap between compulsory education and the next phase on young adults' journeys is potentially precarious. However, this study emphasises the importance of ensuring that the young adults have the required career skills to navigate even complex transitions.

This study suggests that young adults' journeys can include steps backward, reconsiderations, side-steps, and unsuccessful transitions. Navigating these requires young adults to know what they want and can do, how to utilise the different resources they can access, and where to find additional support. The 15-24 Learner Journey Review (Scottish Government, 2018) by the Scottish government has already highlighted and acknowledged some of the complexities in young adults' journeys. The support in these areas appears to be provided well by career advisors in different settings, and the targeted approach seeks to ensure that those who need it most receive the support. The career advisors' accounts reflected the wide range of support that they offered. However, this support was targeted, which meant that many of this study's participants had to either explicitly seek career advisor support or use other resources. While the participants had resources, such as My World of Work, they did not appear to utilise these resources independently. Ensuring that the platform is used by young adults in their career journeys could help provide the wider cohort of young adults with the support that they need.

One of the key reasons for the complex journeys appears to be lack of firm preference regarding a career. Those participants who did not have a strong preference did nonetheless apply for further education in some field of work and formed a plan with their guidance

teachers. As discussed in Chapter 5, sometimes the choice was made based on potential future jobs being 'secured' in a field through social connections, or the young adult picked one of the potentially interesting fields of work. However, the choices made in this way appeared to be relatively fragile and prone to change if some element about the expected work or the mode of education did not feel good to the young adult.

Despite having enjoyed school, and having performed well in school, many participants found college and especially university challenging. The lack of structure and feeling of purposelessness in what they did in university appears to have been the main contributor for them to drop out of university.

Therefore, there appears to be young adults who do not know what they want to do at the end of schooling despite having experienced numerous employer partnership activities in schools and having received support on how to approach findings potential good careers. Thus, the policy should not assume that the first transition attempt from school to work will be successful for those young adults who have a college or university placement waiting for them after school. This is where ensuring that everyone has developed their career skills is important.

7.3 Limitations, future avenues for study, and personal reflections

I finish this Chapter with a brief outline of limitations, potential future topics for research, and a final comment where I reflect on the PhD journey and what is to come.

Limitations

This study has discussed various elements of young adults' decision-making and provided further insight into the moments young adults make decisions, the role of reflexivity in decision-making, and the way the Scottish structures guide and frame the decision-making process. However, the study has some limitations.

First, the study, while examining the young adults' journeys from schooling until the young adults reached MA training, focuses on a relatively short period of decision-making. Therefore, the study is not able to examine the journeys beyond the point when young adults reached their MA training.

The second limitation of the study is related to the sampling of the participants. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the initial target to sample young adults from the growth sectors targeted specifically by the DYW policy could not be done. While the young adults' journeys in the

study are very informative and they provide a great insight into the decision-making process, the young adults were not engaged with some of the DYW related measures. For example, the Foundation Apprenticeships were not often encountered by the young adult participants and most of them had not even heard of FAs. One potential reason for this is that the young adults were not interested in pursuing careers in fields where the FAs were more readily available. While it would not have guaranteed exposure to the FA offering, it could have been more likely.

A different sample of young adults, for example who pursued other fields of study, could potentially also reveal different key influencers or slightly different influencing process. However, I argue that the basic process from the young adults' perspective would hold despite different samples and pursued fields. While the information needs would be different when pursuing different fields, similar actors would likely be providing the requried information. This is due to young people being connected to specific sets of actors either through institutions or through their personal social circles. The findings from this study showed the similarity in the key moments of decision-making and influencers in those moments despite some substantial differences in the pursued fields in this study's sample.

The second sampling related limitation of the study was the lack of successful access to personal influencers. While I reached out to the personal influencers of the young adults, I did not receive any responses beyond initial indications that they might be open to participating in the study. A likely reason for this is that the data collection happened during the first year of the Covid pandemic, which caused considerable stress on people's time and well-being. This could have resulted in the personal influencers not having the time or interest in engaging with the study to contribute their viewpoint into the study. As a response to this limitation, the study shifted focus further towards the institutional influencers and how their practice potentially influenced the young adults, so the study had enough data and viewpoints to form a good understanding of the influencers involved in the young adults' journeys as well as the institutional structures where the young adults operated in.

Finally, as I was transcribing the interview data, I realised that at times I asked questions from the participants that contained multiple points at one time. Occasionally this resulted in a slight loss of information as the participants had not responded to one part of the questions. In most cases the lack of response was caught during the interview and the participant was asked to elaborate on the missing points of data, but sometimes these elements were missing.

However, there was no systematic miss of data that rendered the study unable to comment on certain elements of the research questions.

Future avenues

The findings of this study contribute to the understanding of different factors that affect young adults' decision-making, but the findings also suggest at least two good avenues for future research.

First, further research into the effects of taking part in the intense partnership activities such as the FAs on the young adults' educational choices would help understand how activities like that might affect young adults' decision-making. As these are relatively new form of activity in the Scottish context, understanding their effects would be important for supporting young adults' transitions.

Second, future studies should be conducted to better understand if the activity of young adults to look for information affects their transition behaviours and educational journeys. The scope of the current study did not include a detailed examination of the extent to which young adults conducted independent research, only the different sources they used in their search for options. The findings suggest that some young adults, especially in school, were not very active in their search. As such, understanding the conditions that incentivise young adults to engage with the different resources available to them would contribute both to general understanding of young adults' decision-making as well as on practices supporting young adults' transitions.

Personal reflections

My personal journey through the PhD has helped me grow as a researcher despite the various difficulties posed by the Covid pandemic. When I started my PhD, I had a good basic understanding of a broad range of different methods and approaches, so I felt relatively confident starting my journey. However, this research has made me engage with different theoretical frameworks and approaches on a much deeper level than before. As a result, I was able to engage with the data more meaningfully, which made the whole research process more enjoyable.

I have also learned to appreciate the depth and complexity involved in young adults' transitions as a result of this research. While I studied the role of influencers in my master's dissertation research, this study has examined it more depth. The number of systems and

actors involved in creating the environments for decision-making is astonishing, and I will only continue to learn more going forward.

The issue of young adults' transitions is still just as relevant as it was when I began this research. The pandemic has caused various disruptions to society and to young people's journeys. It was already evident in this study in the journeys of young adults, whether their schooling was cut short by the pandemic, or if their employment journeys were complicated by it. As a result, the structures and support provided to young people are needed going forward and I hope that the findings from this study can help in the development of that support.

My journey after this PhD is going to take me back to Finland. In the short-term, I will try to create impact from this research. This involves trying to have journal articles published and material provided to organisations like the SDS who can benefit from the findings of this study. In the long-term, I seek to build a career in Finland leveraging all that I have learned to help build better support for young people to pursue their aspirations.

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Appendix A: Interview schedules

YOUNG ADULTS

Question themes and example questions for interviews with young adults

The order of questions will vary from interview to interview in case some of the areas get addressed naturally in a conversation.

Current training and background

First, I would like to know a little bit about your work and training at the moment. Could you tell me what role you're training for at the moment and what this training involves?

Possible prompts:

- What kind of job role are you training for?
- When did you start your MA?

Okay, before we move on to talk about more about your currant apprenticeship and your reasons for choosing it, I am also interested in what you did before this apprenticeship. Could you tell me a little about that?

P*rompts*

- What were you doing before this apprenticeship?
- Background questions
    - Questions about what they did in the past
        - Schooling
            - When did you leave school and what age were you when you left school?
        - Work
        - Care of dependents for example
    - What do their parents or carers do?

Motivations to go into apprenticeship training

As you know from the information package that I sent to you, I am interested in why you have chosen to go into apprenticeship training, so could you tell me a little bit about your motivations and reasons for doing a modern apprenticeship?

Prompts

- What made you choose to do a modern apprenticeship?
    - May possible reasons, but could be:
        - Learning method
            - The hands-on approach was appealing, has the way of learning to practice your craft turned out to be what you expected?
        - Field of work
            - Anything specific about the task? Status, the way it is conducted, tools that are being used?

        - Location
            - Was it local or a location that you wanted to live near?
        - Money
        - An influencer told good things/ recommended it
        - Foundation apprenticeships in school
            - What made you choose to do a foundation apprenticeship?
        - COVID?

Could you tell me a little bit about any other options that you might have been considering for yourself besides this apprenticeship?

Prompts

- What were these options?
- What made you not choose these options for yourself in the end?

When did you start thinking about these options for yourself?

- When did you start considering an apprenticeship training as an option for yourself?
    - Where was the option presented to you?
        - Parents, friends, school for example
- When did you first consider your current field of work as an option for yourself?
    - Is it this role specifically you're interested in?
    - What is it that interests you in this field?
- Perceptions of risk, did you have any reservations?

Sources of information

Optional lead-in: You have discussed some reasons for choosing an apprenticeship training for yourself, but I would like to ask a little bit more about the different information you had for making the decision and people that you might have consulted about it.

Could you tell me about the sources of information you had when you were making these educational decisions?

If appropriate, could you start with how you learned about apprenticeships in general, and then where you learned about the different specific options that you were considering, such as the role that you're in now.

- What kind of information did you have available to you?
    - First, where did you learn about apprenticeship training in general?
    - What kinds of things were you told about apprenticeships?
        - Modern apprenticeships specifically
    - What did you learn about apprenticeships from school specifically?
- What was the application process like?
    - What was required?
    - Did you feel that you had adequate support in the process?

        - Who were the ones who supported?
- How did you find out about this apprenticeship opportunity specifically?
    - Several possibilities again, could even be self-driven search through online resources etc.
        - How did they find out about these resources?

Support and others' attitudes

Could you tell me how you perceived other peoples' attitudes to be towards apprenticeships?

- What was the attitude of people around you towards apprenticeships?
    - Parents/guardians
        - Supportive of them generally or hesitant in some way? Did they give any reasons for this?
    - Peers
        - Same as above for follow up
    - Relatives
    - Teachers / careers counsellors
        - Were there other suggested options presented to you?
            - How prominently was apprenticeship training promoted?
                - Did that affect your attitude towards apprenticeships?
    - Who did you discuss your plans with?

Key influencers

Could you tell me about the people who you think were the most important for your decision to go into a modern apprenticeship? Who they were and why you feel they supported you most in going to a Modern Apprenticeship

- Who would you say were most important people for affecting your choice to go into apprenticeship training?
    - Why?
    - Specific information, attitudes of others, that you felt supported your decision?
- How did your previous experiences (schooling/work) prepare you for challenges in an apprenticeship?

Barriers

My final theme here is about any barriers or challenges you might have faced during this whole process of your decision-making and application. You have mentioned things like …. Could you elaborate a little bit on them or add other considerations you had or obstacles you had to surpass to get here?

- Have there been any unexpected challenges in the apprenticeship training?
- Did you experience any barriers in accessing apprenticeship training?
    - For example, money
    - Lack of information
    - Lack of opportunities

    - Dependants
    - Time
- Was the Covid pandemic a challenge or a barrier, and if so in what way?

Thank you for all of your answers, I would just like to ask if you would like to add anything to the conversation that we have had. Maybe something that I might have missed in my questions.

CAREER ADVISORS and INFLUENCERS

Institutional influencers question themes

Could you tell me about your current job role a little bit? Who you work with, where you're based and things like this?

- What is your current role?
    - careers advisor/ work coach
        - Connected to a school or not?
- How is your role connected to young adults' transitions from school to work?
- Could you tell me a little bit about how the advisory process works in practice?
    - What ways do you have to advice or inform young adults?
    - Which partners do you work with and could you describe the partnership processes?
        - How do you collaborate with teachers for example, if you're in school.
    - What would you say are the key issues that you need to cover in each young adults' case?
        - And if there is more of a support need, what are the priorities in those meetings?

This study seeks to understand young adults' decision-making as well as how people around them influence these decisions.

Could you tell me a little bit about the process and the aims of guidance that you provide to young adults that come to you?

- What kinds of support and information do young adults that come to you need when you meet with them in person or whatever the equivalent of that is nowadays?
    - Progression information?
    - Practical application help?
    - Outlining possible options?
- How long does the support last? Is it short term or a bit longer term?
    - Is it a single session, multiple sessions over a period of time? What factors affect the amount of support that you are providing?
- For those in schools:
    - If you have a student coming to you at some point in S5 for example, who says that they're leaving school at the end of S5, are there any critical points that you wish to cover with them before they leave?

        - Do they get bumped up to higher priority if they intend to leave early?
- For those outside schools:
    - When you get young adults coming to you, what are some of the common reasons that they come to seek guidance
        - Did they not get into any college or jobs after school, or are there many that have been dissatisfied with their choice post-school?
    - APPRENTICE TRANSITION PLAN for redundant apprentices
        - I have recently heard about this, have you had any young adults coming to make use of this?

Do you communicate exclusively with the young adults themselves or are there other parties involved? Parents, teachers,

- How extensively do you discuss different options with the young adults?
    - Do you do any recommendations for choices, and if so, how does the process work?
        - Any reasons for their answer?
            - Grades, young adult's personal preferences for example
    - Did you provide any information that the young adult did not seem to have before?
        - Is there something that young adults do not usually know about, or is it more case-by-case dependent?
    - Did you provide any other assistance to the young adult? Providing any practical application help, resources, or something like that?
        - Same here, is there something that is commonly lacking or needed where you're providing support or help, or is it more case by case?
    - If the young adult had done a foundation apprenticeship, did this affect the guidance provided during the discussions at all?
        - If so, how?
- Did you instruct the young person to discuss the topic of apprenticeships with their parents or carers?
    - How frequently or extensively did they manage to talk to parents/carers
    - What kinds of things did they talk about with them?
        - Does this differ from what they discuss with the young adults?
- Attitude towards apprenticeships
    - In your experience, how do the people coming to you view apprenticeships?
    - How much do they know about apprenticeships when they come in?
        - Positive, negative, what are the reasons for this?
    - Is there a person you would think the apprenticeship option is best suited for as opposed to some of the other options?
        - Could be just the person's personal preference, but could be other factors as well?
        - Why is this?

What's the most challenging area in CMS?

Work experience and opportunities

- Do you discuss the education and training options with people connected to young adults? For example parents in these example questions.
    - Or do you provide materials also for parents about the different educational pathways?
    - If yes,
        - What do you tell them about apprenticeships?
            - Why these things specifically?
            - Do parents seem familiar with apprenticeships as they are today?
        - What is the attitude of parents towards apprenticeships when you discuss the option with them?
            - Does this appear to change as they communicate with you?
        - Do you feel that you have enough time to discuss these options with parents?
            - If no, what else would you like to discuss with parents?
    - If no,
        - Would you like to discuss these options with parents?
            - Why, why not?
        - If this should be done by someone else, who and why do you think that?
- Considering the current context, how does coronavirus affect your services and has it changed some practices in the long term?
    - How is the support delivery working now without fact-to-face contact?
    - Are there any specific concerns that the covid situation has caused?
- Is there anything you would like to add? Something I might have missed in my questions or if there is something you wish to add?

POLICY EXPERTS

Information about the role and position

Could you tell me about your role and how it is connected to DYW (or how you have been connected to DYW in other roles)

- At what phase of the DYW did you start in the role?
- Could you tell me about the policy making/coordination/implementation experiences you had? What were the main obstacles?

DYW policy, its aims and its components

DYW is a policy that touches upon many areas of young adults' transitions to the labour market. Could you tell me which parts of the policy are most relevant for improving transitions to apprenticeships?

- Why are these parts central?
- Careers service
    - More detailed questions about this follow
- Employer partnerships
    - How do they work in practice?

    - What are the common activities yielded by these partnerships, and have they become permanent (prior to covid anyways)
- Foundation apprenticeships
    - What are the aims of FAs
        - Do they fulfil a function to attract more young adults into vocational education or apprenticeships specifically?
            - Why would the introduction of FAs fulfil this goal?

Careers guidance services and DYW

Could you tell me about the aims and functions of the careers guidance services, and if these have been affected by the introduction of DYW?

- Providing careers services
    - To whom? Why are these targeted?
        - Are the services trying to reach anyone through the target population (for example parents through young adults)
- Did DYW alter the aims or functions of these services, if so, how?

Which roles make up the careers service offering?

- How integral are teachers, for example?
- Do the services have different aims at different sites (schools, elsewhere)? Could you tell me how the practices differ
    - How does this affect the delivery of the services?
- Which are the groups of people that the services aim to reach
            - Are the services attempting to communicate directly with these actors, and if so, how?
            - Are there any specific goals towards these people?
    - Why/why not these groups or others?

Are there any changes that have happened recently, or that are coming to the careers guidance services?

- Are they a result of policy changes (like Learner's Journey Review), or are they part of ongoing development of practices for example?
    - Has there been a change in how the service is delivered?
    - Any changes in priorities of the service?
    - If there have not been major changes, how does the guidance service fit the DYW goals?
    - Are the potential changes seen as permanent changes, or temporary only for the duration of DYW policy?
    - Do the school employer partnerships regionally have any effect on this?
-

Does the system target any specific groups of people with the vocational offering (such as young adults of specific background or education/employment status)?

    - If so, why?
    - What are the targeting criteria?

    - If a group is targeted by the service, what does the service seek to provide for these people?
        - Does it try to promote specific opportunities like apprenticeships, or does it provide a broad selection of options for example

COVID

The current situation has most likely affected the service provision as it has affected basically every part of the economy and society as a whole. Could you tell me where it has had the most drastic effects regarding the services and policy mechanisms we have talked about?

- Are the effects likely to be just temporary, or more long lasting?
- Do you anticipate any changes to the current policies/practices due to the covid situation?