The career decision-making process of Irish underage international footballers

Thesis submitted by:
Vincent O'Flaherty
BBS (Hons), H.Dip.Ed (Hons), CCPW (Hons)

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Supervisors:
Dr. Majella McSharry & Dr. Geraldine Scanlon

School of Human Development
Institute of Education
Dublin City University

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Vincent O'Flaherty

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Glossary of Terms

BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council
CEF	Career and Employment Facilitator
DDSL	Dublin and District Schoolboys League
EWO	Education and Welfare Officer
EU/EEA	European Union/European Economic Area
FAI	Football Association of Ireland
FAI/ETB	Football Association of Ireland /Education and Training Board
FAI ETP	Football Association of Ireland Emerging Talent Programme
FIFA	Fédération Internationale de Football Association
FIFA RSTP	FIFA Regulations on the Status and Transfer of Players
FIFA TMS	FIFA Transfer Matching System
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association
IFA	Irish Football Association
IFAB	International Football Association Board
IRFU	Irish Rugby Football Union
PASTE	Progressing Accessible Supported Transitions to Employment
SFAI	Schoolboys Football Association of Ireland
UEFA	Union of European Football Associations
UK	United Kingdom

Abstract

The career decision-making process of Irish underage international footballers

Author: Vincent O'Flaherty

Researching adolescents who participate in sport, particularly at an elite level, involves investigating their environment, social support structures and how they develop and maintain continuity in their lives during the many transitions they make. A key feature of this research is its sociological and longitudinal dimension which provides a window into the lives of young Irish underage international football players. Because this social world has never been examined before, a conscious decision was made to ensure the focus of the research harnessed the voices of the participants. The key reason for doing so was to illustrate how they view the elite sporting environment they are immersed in, their attitudes to education and their long-term career planning, all of which are encapsulated by the ambition to migrate from Ireland to a professional football club in the United Kingdom.

In an attempt to provide a better understanding of the career decision-making process of the participants in this study, a pragmatic methodological research approach was chosen. This was principally because of the requirement to utilise all available resources for data collection having particular sensitivity to contextual considerations. This involved administering a self-completion questionnaire to three Irish underage international teams, followed by three separate focus groups and eleven individual interviews over a three-year period. The participants of the study had all been members of one of the three underage international football teams under investigation. This included the Irish under fifteen, under sixteen and under seventeen football squads.

This research is underpinned by a theoretical framework called careership theory, developed by Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson (1996). The application of this conceptual framework is particularly important because it examines the central relationship between structure (the objective) and agency (the subjective). In addition to this, the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Jean Côté's Developmental Model of Sports Participation, Schlossberg's (1981) model for analyzing human adaptation to transition and Scanlon and Doyle's (2018) model for supported transition are utilised as they work seamlessly to build on careership theory. They are also used to plot and understand the transitions young international footballers believe they have to make to become full-time professionals.

Introduction

From the outset, it is important to reveal the premise behind this research. Academic achievement was central to my upbringing and, although never openly discussed, there was a tacit understanding that it was a key instrument for upward mobility. Being the oldest of two boys and having shown an aptitude for academic work in primary school, expectations were set at a particularly high level. Although none of my extended family had ever attended third level education, pursuing this pathway was always encouraged. In contrast, with no strong tradition of sport in my family, representing club and county at Gaelic games was rarely acknowledged and often misunderstood as a distraction. Personally, playing Gaelic games was quite the opposite as it provided freedom and a vehicle through which I could express myself in ways that were not possible off the pitch. Having a keen interest in sport and academia from a young age, I struggled to balance both, sometimes sacrificing one over the other. In fact, this quandary even continued as this thesis was being written and therefore, this struggle has continued for over twenty years commencing in 1998.

Early September 1998 was the beginning of my final year in secondary school which would conclude in June 1999 with a state exam called the Leaving Certificate. At the time, this exam was very important to me because the results determined entry into higher education. This period also saw my participation in Gaelic games peak in terms of intensity, due to my involvement with nine separate teams for both club and county, in hurling and Gaelic football ranging from underage to senior level. This period in my life was at the time 'normal', however, on reflection, it was extremely demanding as each team expected a full commitment with little regard for the demands of the other teams or the impending Leaving Certificate exam. This inevitably required sacrifices to be made and regrettably, my academic studies suffered. Due to a poor Leaving Certificate, relative to my capabilities, the question I have constantly asked myself since then is, why did I have to choose one over the other, that is, sport or academia? The answer is (now) relatively simplistic, it was due to the absence of a support network and a lack of understanding by coaches and teachers to truly understand the person rather than the player or the student.

Following third level education, I have had a varied career, moving from banking to secondary school teaching to child protection in football. However, it was a burning ambition to

understand how society shapes who we are, particularly the career path we believe we are choosing. A key question that I have always wanted to answer is; how does the context of our collective lives, shape how individuals and society interpret their version of reality, particularly in relation to what type of career is perceived to be possible and appropriate? Specifically, I wanted to understand the views of children caught up in the same dilemma I found myself in during my Leaving Certificate year. As I was working for the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) prior to commencing this research, I decided to investigate the experiences of Irish underage international footballers to understand if it was possible for them to have a dual career. Therefore, the voice of the participants had to be central to any research I was going to undertake as it had to accurately depict their life as they saw it.

Through my work with the FAI, it was evident Irish underage international players were very well respected in Irish football and society generally. However, no one had documented the voice of this elite cohort of players to analyse how their career decisions were made as they interacted with their social surroundings. Furthermore, there was also a lack of knowledge concerning the influence of their career decisions on their academic education and consequently their future career options should a career in professional football not materialise. Therefore, this research set about investigating these areas by focusing specifically on footballers who had been selected to play underage international football at under fifteen, sixteen and seventeen level for the Republic of Ireland at a particular point in time. Choosing this cohort was unique for a number of reasons; (1) their compulsory education was coming to an end, (2) their football development had reached international level, and (3) structurally, there appeared to be a lack of coherence between their football development and academic education. Incorporating these three factors, this research wanted to investigate if a dual career was possible for this cohort? Therefore, this research set out to understand what support structures are necessary to assist Irish underage international footballers to manage the demands of both fields.

At a European level a number of reports were commissioned by the European Union to highlight the importance of dual careers in sport, notably, 'The Education of Young Elite Sportspersons' (Amara et al., 2004) and 'Guidelines on dual careers of athletes - Recommended policy actions in support of dual careers in high-performance sport' (European Commission, 2012; López de Subijana, Barriopedro & Conde, 2015). Interestingly, key findings identified that in Ireland, no formal structures were in place to manage a child's sporting and academic

achievements concurrently and this responsibility was left to each school, the students themselves and their parents (European Commission, 2012). Furthermore, when compared to other European countries, it was reported that Ireland lacked any formal specialised sports school to assist with the integration of both education and sport for young elite athletes (Amara et al., 2004). Interestingly, however, the FAI do provide funding for a UK welfare officer to support Irish footballers who have migrated to the UK to join professional football clubs (FAI, 2012).

The development of reports that highlight the importance of having a dual career for athletes is to be welcomed, however, the difficulty with these pan European studies is that they use a top-down/macro level methodological approach. As a consequence, they are limited because they fail to reflect the voice of the athlete due to their over reliance on policy documents provided by European sports federations, governments and national governing bodies for sport in each country. For example, the picture a Football Association paints of the landscape of the sport they administer, can be very different from the experiences of young children who participate in the game at grass roots level right up to international level.

In contrast to the European reports, this research took a different approach and presents the voice of the child through their eyes rather than those around them, for example, parents, coaches or teachers, who may have a different interpretation and their own agenda. To achieve this, it is necessary from the outset to understand how sport is structured in Ireland and, it is argued, that it is built on three key pillars that include; (1) Physical Education which is part of the school curriculum, (2) extra-curricular sports played in the school, and (3) formal sport played outside the school in sports clubs or other sporting environments (Fahey, Delaney & Gannon, 2005). The first two pillars, Physical Education and extra-curricular sports in school, requires commitment, time and expertise on the part of teachers who promote cultural and sporting values which are transferred to students who pass through the school system (ibid). This research will examine how the participants view football in school as an extra-curricular activity to establish how it is positioned in their lives, if at all. Following this, this research will concentrate on the third pillar, that is, football outside of school to examine how the game is organised at schoolboy level and to establish if the lack of a professional structure in Irish football creates a fracturing of football and education into two separate fields for the participants.

Including the structures that influence young players' decisions to become a professional footballer, deciding what career to choose during adolescence is difficult with Gothard et al. (2001, p. 35) suggesting it is also at this age we are likely to have an "early youthful dream" concerning the career we would like to have. When we consider professional football as a career, Richardson et al. (2012, p. 1609) note that "[t]he 'dream' of playing in the English Premier League, however distant, is a difficult proposition to ignore". This aspiration is heightened by the glamorisation of professional football which Irish underage international footballers are exposed to through mass media, the culture they inhabit and the opportunities which are presented to them, such as international selection and trials with professional clubs in the United Kingdom (UK). When speaking to colleagues in the FAI who worked with the Irish underage international teams prior to this research commencing, they suggested that the status of going on trials and playing international football created a misguided reality that convinced the young players and their parents that they were taking one step closer to an illustrious career as a professional footballer. This research will investigate the accuracy of this assumption by unravelling how the participants see their reality to get a sense of how their identities are being reshaped by their unique football experiences.

The transformation from a schoolboy club player to an Irish underage international is a significant event bringing with it social validation and an elevated status resulting in their talent being a very much sought-after commodity. Those scrambling for the services of these young talented Irish players includes agents/intermediaries, scouts working for professional football clubs and the coaches from the underage football teams they play in. These include their club team, the league representative/county team, the FAI Emerging Talent Programme (FAI ETP), possibly a school's team and of course the pinnacle, underage international football for the Republic of Ireland. This phase of their life also includes attending trials with professional football clubs in the UK from the age of fourteen. This is important because career progression in football is often misguided by the belief that it is a linear process (Botelho & Agergaard, 2011; Coupland, 2015). As a consequence, playing for all of these teams should only be viewed as an opportunity to build skills rather than be seen as 'the next step' to become a full-time professional footballer. Therefore, this research will investigate if the time allocated to their football development impacts on their ability to manage the demands of their academic education.

It is important for children and their parents to manage the demands of football including the different milestones mentioned above. However, this is not to simply provide space for their education, but instead their holistic development. This includes spending time with family and friends and even participation in other sports to prevent a one-dimensional football identity from being formed from an early age. Therefore, this research will also examine how young talented footballers and their parents can be supported during the many transitions they will face including the high's as well as the inevitable lows such as injuries, deselection, pressure, migration or failing to get a contract with a professional football club. This support should also include how to manage relationships with key gatekeepers such as coaches and scouts. It is also important to acknowledge the role of chance in career progression because there can be a misconception that talent and talent alone will guarantee career success. It is hoped that this research will illuminate the complexity of career progression particularly in relation to professional football to ensure a dual career is expected and demanded by young footballers and their families.

Thesis Structure

The following section will provide an outline of how this thesis is structured. **Chapter One** contains a detailed overview of how the game of association football (commonly known in Ireland as soccer) has evolved and how the game is structured globally. Using key events such as the Bosman ruling and the introduction of the FIFA Regulations on the Status and Transfer of Players in 2001, I examine how children are positioned relative to the global game. Particular focus is placed on the structure of the game in Ireland to identify what drives the migration of children to pursue a career in professional football. The premise of this chapter is to provide the reader with a clear description of the domestic and global structures that shape the career decision-making process of Irish underage international footballers.

Chapter Two sets out the theoretical framework used in this research which was careership theory, originally developed by Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson (1996) and later expanded on by Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997). This theoretical framework was chosen because instead of focusing on how policy makers viewed the transition from school to work, it allows the career decision-making process to be chronicled through the voice of young people (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996). Central to this chapter was evaluating careership theory in a way that develops a theoretical understanding of how Irish underage international footballers make their career decisions. To do so, I focused on; (1) how these footballers

interacted with the football system to develop expertise, (2) the role of parents in this process and (3) if a dual career was supported in a way that allowed active participation in school work and football development. Together with careership theory, this research also draws on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Côté's developmental model of sport participation, Schlossberg's model for analyzing human adaptation to transition and Scanlon and Doyle's new model for supported transition. This provided a theoretical approach that could be used to sufficiently interpret and analyse the data collected in a way that examined not only the individual but how interaction with their social surroundings influenced their choice of career.

Chapter Three describes the methods used to collect data from the participants. The principle objective was to ensure the research presented an accurate reflection of how young footballers chose professional football as a career. Therefore, by focusing principally on the voice of the participants, this chapter will explain how and why a questionnaire, focus groups and individual semi-structured interviews were used to gather and present the stories of the participants.

In **Chapter Four,** it begins by describing how the participants were introduced to football, principally by providing an insight into who was involved. This was done by firstly, looking at the role of the family and secondly, the relationship the participants in this study had with their local football club. I also examine the structure of Irish schoolboy football in relation to how it influences the decisions of young footballers particularly if they should transfer from their local football club to clubs perceived to provide more opportunities to develop their football career. In this chapter, I also introduce the argument that the participants begin to use and be used by the Irish schoolboy system to begin the process of manufacturing a move to a professional football club in the UK. Interestingly, this chapter illustrates how football gradually transitions from a game to the possibility of seeing professional football as a possible career prospect. Therefore, this chapter demonstrates why the participants seek to improve their standing in Irish football to maximise opportunities to display their talent. The final section of this chapter presents the stories of two of the participants to highlight the complexity of the career decisions Irish footballers are faced with from a young age. The two participants are chosen because they came from the same town, participated on the same international team yet their careers took very different pathways. Comparing their experiences is particularly interesting because it highlights how the career decision-making process is always context related, unpredictable and never linear.

Chapter Five commences with an overview of how the participants interacted with underage cup competitions and football scouts. This demonstrates the significance of how young footballers use the football structure to manufacture a trial with a professional football club in the UK. With all of the participants attending football trials, I examine the participants' experiences as they enter the professional football environment for the first time and if this had any impact on their career decision to become a professional footballer. Furthermore, I also use the voices of three participants in this chapter to highlight how difficult the trial experience can be. It is hoped that this presents an accurate account of the difficulties young footballers might face as they delve into this new environment.

In **Chapter Six**, one of the central themes of this study is examined, which is how Irish underage international footballers combine their football development with the demands of their academic schooling. The chapter provides an intriguing insight into the lives of the participants by tracing their relationship with education, beginning with national school and then their transition to secondary school. I also set out to understand the participants interaction with their first state exam, the Junior Certificate. It is interesting to see how the participants approached their Junior Certificate year which was based on a number of factors including; their academic ability, their time commitment to football and whether they had been offered a contract with a professional football club in the UK. As the chapter progresses, we begin to see a separation of the participants lives for the first time; those who migrate compared to those who remained in Ireland. Therefore, the chapter follows the different education paths of each of the participants which varied depending on their geographic location. For the participants who remained in Ireland they provided an insight into their involvement with the senior cycle of secondary school. For the participants who had signed with professional football clubs in the UK, I examine the academic education they receive and their interpretation of how this will be used to prepare them for a career after football.

Chapter Seven focuses on the decision-making process of the participants who migrated to a professional football club and is in effect an examination of their school to work transition. This chapter commences by examining the recruitment practices of professional football clubs and then it considers the unreported process of migration that involves leaving family and friends. The chapter then examines the associated pressure to succeed as a professional footballer in the UK which manifests a deep sense of a fear of failure. This chapter also

investigates if the participants are prepared for deselection and the subsequent transition when they return home to Ireland.

In **Chapter Eight** the key findings identified in each of the chapters are presented and used to offer recommendations for parents, policy makers and more importantly to those young footballers who will inevitably follow a similar career path in the future. In addition to this, future research opportunities are identified to broaden our understanding of the career decisions of young Irish footballers and other athletes alike.

Chapter 1

The socio-historical emergence of globalised football and the positioning of the elite child footballer

1.0 Introduction

Many world leaders, such as Barak Obama, Pope Francis, Kofi Annan and Nelson Mandela have highlighted the important role sport plays in society, particularly its role in providing young people with an instrument to express themselves through a universal language (Mandela, 2000; Annan, 2005; Mullin, 2017; Obama, 2017). In fact, it is suggested that sport, particularly games such as football, provide societies with a vehicle through which their national identities can be expressed and promoted (Sugden & Tomlinson, 1998; Hallmann, Breuer & Kühnreich, 2013). Frey and Eitzen (1991, p. 504) argue that sport is a "microcosm of society" as it provides a structured mechanism through which we can analyse society regarding issues such as subcultures, group dynamics, behaviours, social bonding and socialisation. As such, sport has become a key component of society, with Frey and Eitzen (1991, p. 504) even referring to sport as a "cultural fixation".

Interestingly, there are many ways in which sport can be investigated from an academic perspective such as, the influence it has on health, participation levels, inclusion, exclusion and commercialisation. In addition to this, the professionalisation of sport, particularly for young athletes, has become part of a growing academic discourse in Europe concerning the need to provide a dual career (Guidotti, Cortis, & Capranica, 2015). This is in part, due to the European Union's recognition that it has a significant role to play in protecting athletes who are being placed under significant pressure to concentrate on sport performance at the expense of their education, future career and social development (Aquilina, 2009). The European Commission's concern for this area is evidenced by its investment in research focused on the concept of a dual career for athletes (Amara et al., 2004).

This has promoted dialogue about player wellbeing within both sport and education (Aquilina, 2013) and research has examined the relationship between education and football in a variety of contexts (Parker 1996, 2000, 2001, 2006; Gearing, 1999; Bourke, 2002, 2003; McGillivray, Fern & McIntosh, 2005; McGillivray, 2006; McGillivray & McIntosh, 2006; Brown & Potrac, 2009; Christensen & Sørensen, 2009; Platts & Smith 2009, 2018; Platts, 2012; Kelly, 2014; Curran, 2015a; Curran & Kelly, 2018). However, there is a gap in research concerning the lived

experiences of young Irish underage international footballers and their attempt to manage a dual career as they develop their professional football career.

This chapter will examine the development of football in society and how it creates an objective reality that shapes the decision-making process of children to choose professional football as their future career. It is important to note that the research questions in this study were not addressed in chapter one (these will be discussed later in the study commencing in chapter three). The reason for doing so was to focus on the data collected from the participants in this research to address the research questions directly. Instead, the literature in this section will set out to: (1) trace how the global football industry has developed including its impact in Ireland, (2) examine how culture and commercialisation shape career decisions to choose professional football, (3) identify the reasons children migrate to specific countries to develop their career in football, (4) assess the key structural factors involved in facilitating migration including the networks that are involved and (5) identify issues young footballers need to consider before migrating.

1.1 The Global Development of Football

When we examine the historical context of how sport developed, it is argued that its origins are shrouded in the control and power of the elite upper class since its inception (Coakley, 1998). Control and power however should not be always construed as a negative as they can also promote order, organisation and direction. Prior to the late nineteenth century, association football (commonly referred to as football or soccer) as it is recognised today was very different. It was unregulated and largely considered rough and obscene due to its violence (Dunning, 2001; Curry & Dunning, 2015). The development of formal regulations in football reflects the assertion that the game needed control and order. Dunning (2001) suggests that social conditions began to change in England between the 1830's and 1840's which brought about a move away from games such as folk football. The codification of football (and rugby) in the late nineteenth century resulted in written rules concerning the playing area, the number of participants, the duration of matches and specific rules in relation to the use of physical force (Dunning, 2001).

This formalised structuring of games illustrates a change in society's perception of acceptable behaviour in a sporting context and this was reinforced by a number of key structural shifts in the regulation of football in the late 1800's. The Football Association was formed in 1863 to

provide unification in English football in the form of governance, power, control and organisation to the otherwise unregulated game (Dunning, 2001; Giulianotti, 2005; Pitchford, 2007a; Kelly, 2010). The advent of professionalism in football was formally ratified by the Football Association in 1885 and the Football League was established in 1888 consisting of twelve clubs who played both home and away fixtures (Dunning, 2001; McGovern, 2002; Conn, 2005; Kelly, 2010; Curry & Dunning, 2015).

1886 saw the creation of the International Board (relatively indigenous by modern day standards) which consisted of four members; England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales (Sugden & Tomlinson, 1998). The remit of this board was to initially discuss and standardise football laws across international games between these nations. The International Board, currently referred to as the International Football Association Board (IFAB), has evolved to become the body responsible for determining the laws of the game of association football across the globe. IFAB still consists of the four home nations, albeit, without the FAI. The FAI broke away from the Irish Football Association (IFA) in 1921 (FAI, 2010) and is responsible for governing football in the Republic of Ireland (Bourke, 2003).

The present-day governance of football across five continents is notably hierarchical with Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) being the international governing body (McGovern, 2002; Coakley, 2009; Jarvie, 2012) and is identified as having more political influence than many countries (Sugden & Tomlinson, 1998). It is suggested that football on a global international scale only began to take shape with the creation of FIFA in 1904 (Giulianotti, 2005). In addition to this, football was being spread across the globe through the expansion of industrialisation, trade and commercial activity across the British Empire (Stead & Maguire, 2000; Giulianotti, 2005). The individuals responsible for the promotion of the game were the engineers, military personnel and commercial traders who travelled to every corner of the globe as the British Empire grew. From FIFA's very humble beginnings with just seven members, its membership has grown significantly to over two-hundred members in the twenty-first century (Jarvie, 2012; FIFA, 2018a) and it has a capital reserve of one billion pounds (Cashmore & Dixon, 2016).

More importantly however was the "social and cultural space for football to develop as the national game" (Sugden & Tomlinson, 1998, p. 307) in many countries across the world. Notably, this space was successfully cultivated in countries in South America such as Brazil,

Argentina and Uruguay and in European countries such as Italy, Spain, France and Germany (Sugden & Tomlinson, 1998) all of whom have collectively won twenty of the twenty-one World Cup finals between 1930 and 2018 (FIFA, 2018b). England, who won the World Cup in 1966, is the other country. FIFA's increase in popularity can also be traced to politics and the early World Cups, the first of which was held in Uruguay in 1930, provided countries with a medium through which they could develop their profiles on the world stage (Sugden & Tomlinson, 1998). In addition to this and particularly during the period when the British Empire was dismantling, joining FIFA was critical for new independent nations especially in Africa, who used football "as a symbol of liberation" (ibid, p. 308).

With the increasing popularity of football across the world and with countries seeking membership of FIFA, the shift of power moved from the grips of the home nations consisting of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, who saw themselves as the founding fathers of football. Although the home nations had established the International Board in 1886, they soon realised that football was thriving under the control of FIFA. This eventually led to the International Board inviting FIFA to become part of their rule making body in 1913 (IFAB, 2016). FIFA's development also saw the creation of six confederations one of which saw the establishment of the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) in 1954 (Sugden & Tomlinson, 1998; European Commission, 1998, 2012). Reporting directly to FIFA under this hierarchical structure, UEFA is the administrative body for association football in Europe (Jarvie, 2012). Thus, each country in Europe including the home nations has to affiliate directly to UEFA and strictly comply with its rules and regulations.

The introduction of formal structures has seen football become a truly global sport (Stead & Maguire, 2000; McGovern, 2002; Jarvie, 2012; Roderick, 2013; Elliott, 2016), played by millions and watched by billions across every continent (Cashmore & Dixon, 2016). Football actively illustrates the essence of globalisation through "the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole" (Robertson, 1992 p. 8). Football demonstrates this because it is a profession requiring rare and valuable skills (Stead & Maguire, 2000; Newport, 2016), yet these same skills are required in professional football leagues across all five continents (McGovern, 2002; Jarvie, 2012). Football also highlights the intensification of global consciousness which was reflected in home television coverage of the 2014 FIFA World Cup, being viewed by over three billion people around the world with one billion

watching the final (FIFA, 2015). Therefore, football is what Giddens (1991) refers to as a 'single social system' that is interconnected on a global scale (Roderick, 2013).

For those living in the mid-nineteenth century, it would have been difficult to foresee the progression and growth of football across England let alone the world (Curry & Dunning, 2015). The essence of the game of football remains simple: eleven individuals trying to move a ball from one direction to another, with an opposing eleven individuals trying to move it in the opposite direction (Cashmore & Dixon, 2016). However, this simplicity is easily forgotten within the global and commercial complexity of twenty-first century football. Since the early 1990's football has seen unprecedented financial change, particularly in England, which is largely due to the influence of the media, particularly television rights (Pitchford et al., 2004; Relvas et al., 2010; Cashmore & Dixon, 2016).

The English Premier League is an example of a commercially exposed environment that provides professional footballers with the opportunity to display their skills on a global stage, following many years of hard work and dedication in their childhood (Stead & Maguire, 2000). This contributes to it being very attractive to young children who want to 'live the dream' by getting paid to pursue their passion. Deloitte's Annual Review of Football Finance in 2011, found that player wages in the 'big five' European leagues namely; England, Spain, France, Italy and Germany, increased by €400 million to exceed €5.5 billion in 2009/10. Significantly, these salaries are only possible due to the commercial contracts professional football clubs have with multinational companies and the revenue generated from television broadcasting rights (Relvas et al., 2010).

Cashmore and Dixon (2016) note that the English Premier League is now televised in over two hundred territories by over eighty broadcasters giving it a potential viewership of over four billion people. Gearing (1999, p. 47) describes players in this environment as being "immersed in an occupational world of intense emotionality and drama". When you compare the vast chasm that exists between the Irish and English professional football leagues in terms of television exposure, it is not difficult to understand why an Irish child would prefer to play in the English Premier League. Elliott (2016) has demonstrated that exposure to the media coverage of English football has had a significant role in shaping Irish players' desires and their decision to migrate from Ireland to pursue a professional football career abroad. Consequently, it exposes the vast gap which exists in terms of the system and rewards available

in England compared to those in Ireland. Similar findings were identified by Stead and Maguire (2000) who found that the media played a significant role influencing Nordic/Scandinavian footballers to migrate to England.

Although the game of football may have undergone little structural changes on the pitch, changes off the pitch have been extensive. The professionalisation of football in 1885 and its impact on how the game has evolved since then should not be underestimated. To contextualise the significance of professionalising football, it was over a hundred years before its counterpart, the game of rugby, would be professionalised in the mid-1990's (Gardiner et al., 2006). Professional football provided the opportunity to receive an income (Roderick, 2006a) which, eventually led to the migration of individuals to work as footballers across the globe. This laid the foundation for football to be a career choice for many Irish men and boys. While this has provided Irish boys with unparalleled opportunities in football, Gardiner et al. (2006) warns of the dangers associated with increased commercialisation and commodification of the game, one of which is the treatment of children in this environment.

1.2 Development of Football in Ireland

The governance of association football on the island of Ireland began in 1880 and was controlled by the IFA from Belfast. However, political tension between nationalists and unionists and the belief that clubs outside of Belfast were being treated unfairly, resulted in the formation of the FAI in 1921 (FAI, 2010). Originally formed to govern the thirty-two counties of Ireland, this was reduced to twenty-six counties and a renaming of the FAI to the Football Association of Ireland Free State in 1923 at a special conference in Liverpool (ibid). Joining FIFA in 1923 was also a significant milestone, being formally recognised as the governing body for association football in the newly formed Irish Free State (ibid), whilst the IFA remained in control of the remaining six counties in Northern Ireland. There is a certain irony to newly formed countries such as the Irish Free State, using football, a game which originated in England, to establish a new-found identity, independent of the British Empire. The FAI Free State reverted back to the FAI in 1936 in advance of the 1937 Irish constitution which was also changing the name of the Irish state to reflect independence from the UK.

Football Associations throughout the world, including the FAI, dictate how the game is administered in their own countries. This involves shaping the culture of football and how it is consumed by individuals such as children in their respective jurisdictions. An example of this

in the twenty-first century is illustrated by the FAI's introduction of underage national leagues, with Ruud Dokter the FAI's High-Performance Director stating:

> It is…a demonstration to these kids, and their parents, that to perform at the best underage level there is no necessity to go to England to develop when the structures which can lead them to the professional game are in place at home. (Ryan, 2017)

This ambitious project by Ruud Dokter to introduce a national pathway for players began in 2010 with the introduction of an under nineteen national league. Since then Mr Dokter has introduced an under seventeen national league in 2015 and an under fifteen national league in 2017, with plans to introduce an under thirteen national league in 2019. However, it is accepted by the FAI that the infrastructure is not in place to compete with countries such as England who offer specialised football training environments to children on a full-time basis. It would require a significant financial investment to introduce full-time academies into Ireland which is unlikely because Irish football clubs do not have the necessary investment and the FAI's revenue is focused on developing a range of other areas across the game.

The scale of managing football in Ireland can be demonstrated by examining the structure of the game. Including the relatively new underage national competitions, the FAI is responsible for all affiliate bodies such as the Schoolboys Football Association of Ireland (SFAI) which provides administration for thirty-two schoolboy leagues. In addition to this, the FAI also controls the underage structure for girl's football and senior domestic competitions including the women's senior national league and the men's senior national league, known as the League of Ireland. Moreover, there are school's competitions, international fixtures from under fifteen to senior level, coach education programmes and the funding of over fifty development officers who work to promote the game in local communities (FAI, 2016a). The broad range of services provided by the FAI, reduces the resources available to assist clubs financially to provide a full-time academy structure. To continue offering the programmes and services they have, the FAI generates income from commercial contracts whist receiving financial assistance from FIFA and UEFA. The FAI also receives money from the Irish state through a statutory body namely, Sport Ireland.

Sport Ireland, the statutory authority with responsibility for regulating sport in the Republic of Ireland states that one of the reasons they invest in sport is because:

> The performance of our leading sportsmen and women is a constant topic of conversation and probably the single area of national life taking up most space in the media. High profile national sporting success creates pride and helps to promote our national identity… (Sport Ireland, 2017)

This statement has far reaching consequences for all sports in Ireland, and one could argue that the amount of money any sport receives can be linked to its success in international competitions and the perceived social value of that sport in a given society (Cobley et al., 2012; Hallmann, Breuer & Kühnreich, 2013) or a government's interpretation of this perception. This is clearly reflected in the amount of money governments invest in sport and particularly in how it is distributed. Coakley (2009) suggests that governments spend public money on sports which people strongly identify with, and this can be seen in participation numbers, attendance at related events and television viewing figures.

The three big sports in Ireland in terms of participation numbers are Rugby, Gaelic games and Football (also known as soccer in Ireland) which collectively received seven million four hundred thousand euro from Sport Ireland in 2016 (Tracey, 2016). Due to this investment from Sport Ireland, the 'big three' sports are provided with greater opportunities than other sports to develop facilities, recruit staff, invest in talent identification and development programmes, all of which contribute to the maintenance of the status quo and interest in participation in these games. The governing bodies of these sports, the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU), the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) and the FAI are autonomous and therefore will prioritise how this money is spent based on their own individual strategic plans such as debt repayments, up-grading stadia, player welfare and administration.

A significant difference between the IRFU, the GAA and the FAI lies in the status of senior players in domestic games. Gaelic games, for example are amateur and as a result, players who play at an elite level for their county do not get paid. Moving to a new team in Ireland or migrating to play GAA professionally is therefore not an option and generally an individual remains loyal to the club and county of their origin. In contrast, the IRFU make a significant financial investment in the domestic professional game through the provincial academy system and through their centralised player contract scheme. The IRFU provide contracts for specific players which ensures they remain with one of the four provincial teams in Ireland (Amara et

al., 2004). This allows the best Irish rugby players to remain in Ireland rather than having to move to countries such as England or France.

Domestic football in Ireland at the highest level is played in the League of Ireland, which is technically a professional league. However, very few clubs are able to offer full time professional contracts as they are financially autonomous (Bourke, 2003) and lack the ability to generate enough income to pay players. In terms of financial investment, the FAI does not pay money to any player directly and offers payments to clubs based on their position in the League of Ireland at the end of each season. In the 2016 League of Ireland Premier division, first place received one hundred and ten thousand euros and last place (of twelve teams) received seventeen thousand euros (Blake, 2016). In comparison, the winners of the English Premier League in the 2016-2017 season received thirty-eight million pounds (approximately forty-two million euro) and for finishing last, in twentieth place, it was one million nine hundred thousand pounds (approximately two million euros) (Davis, 2017). Domestic football in Ireland is also in competition with Rugby, the GAA and a range of other sports for spectators in their stadia, for commercial contracts and media coverage and as a consequence football can suffer from a lack of financial investment and lack of support from the public.

Due to the relatively small revenue League of Ireland clubs generate, the majority of players on contracts (professional or amateur) with 'professional' football clubs are required to have an alternative/additional career to supplement their income. Elliott (2016) interviewed Irish professional players who had migrated to English clubs from the League of Ireland, providing an insight into how they viewed the domestic football league. These players spoke quite negatively about the League of Ireland, citing the lack of full-time football, small crowds, poor wages, poor coaching, no academies and a lack of interest from the FAI. For young Irish footballers, these structural inadequacies are the anthesis to English football which can provide full-time football including the structural conditions and exposure they crave (Curran, 2015a; Stead & Maguire, 2000).

A separate report completed by FIFPro, the global football players union, found that 56.5% of League of Ireland players who responded to their survey (two hundred and forty-four players) earn less than one thousand dollars (800 Euro) per month (FIFPro, 2016). This is comparable to the average 'weekly' earnings of seven hundred and sixteen euro in Ireland in 2016 (CSO, 2017a), placing a footballer's income in Ireland well below the national average. In addition to

these low wages, the average contract was less than twelve months which suggests that players have very little career stability for the following season. These working conditions mean that almost sixty percent of League of Ireland players have a second job. These jobs generally have flexible working hours such as driving a taxi to allow time for training and matches (FIFPro, 2016). Since League of Ireland players face constant job insecurity, it highlights a greater argument for educating players to prepare for a dual career that would provide better working conditions for a career outside of and after football.

For young footballers, the decision to move to a professional football club abroad is influenced by the fact that Ireland has no formal academy system and therefore no consistent standards apply to any club in Ireland. As a result, young players from Ireland (and abroad) look to professional leagues like England who can offer a standardised professional football environment they believe can enable them to achieve their goal to become a professional footballer. The reality for many is that these academies are over populated with young talented footballers from across the globe who are not going to become full-time professional footballers. In fact, many of them are simply there to support the better players achieve their dream (Calvin, 2017). Furthermore, with the increase in competition to access professional football academies, anecdotal evidence suggests that there are less Irish players being offered contracts with English Premier League clubs and they are more likely to join clubs in the Championship or League one (tiers two and three of the English football pyramid). However, in its simplest terms, the type of academy and facilities a professional football club has, does not guarantee a career as a first team professional footballer.

1.3 Cultural impact of Football

The culture we are immersed in constructs an objective reality using instruments such as religion, justice, the arts, science and sport. Focussing specifically on sport, De Knop (1996) argues that it fulfils an important function in reproducing parts of our culture that are valued. Sport is a particularly powerful tool as it can be used as a form of national symbolism or cultural unity (Jarvie, 2012), examples of which include ice-hockey in Canada, American football in the United States, Gaelic games in Ireland, long distance running in Kenya, sumo wrestling in Japan or rugby in New Zealand. This enables individuals to make sense of the world in which they live, offering the prospect of a collective identity that a person shares through interaction with others (European Commission, 1998). Sport, therefore, is a global (McGovern, 2002;

Gardiner et al., 2006; Jarvie, 2012) and social phenomenon (Coakley, 1998, 2009) which plays a significant role, culturally, in our lives (Giulianotti, 2005; Warde, 2006).

Defining what exactly a sport is however gives rise to significant debate within many sections of society and it is in many respects similar to trying to define what religion is (Frey & Eitzen, 1991; Giulianotti, 2005; Gardiner et al., 2006). In fact, it is argued that sport has now become a "surrogate religion for millions" (McGillivray, Fearn & McIntosh, 2005, p. 102). To help us understand the complexity of defining sport, we can use the recent interest society has shown in Mixed Martial Arts (MMA). In MMA, competitors fight each other using an array of skills and techniques taken from older martial arts disciplines such as Brazilian jiu-jitsu, judo, boxing and muay thai. The debate however is whether or not MMA is in its own right a 'sport' and if its competitors are athletes. If it forms part of the existing social fabric of sports consumption (television, radio, newspapers and social media platforms) does this provide it with the necessary social recognition as a sport or does this have to come from the formal policy makers like governments and international sporting federations? The codification and growth of football illustrates how the centralisation and control of a sport through one international body, in this instance FIFA, ensured its global development.

There is no doubt, geographic location (country, county, state or town) and the policies implemented by national governments such as financial investment, play a significant role in shaping (constraining and enabling) young people's relationship with cultural instruments such as sport. This relationship is also institutionally organised and operated by national governing bodies and sport federations (Vaeyens et al., 2009) who largely measure success based on the money they put into their programmes versus the economic gains they generate. The same financial logic applies to media corporations such as Sky and BT Sport who are also looking for a financial return on their investment in sports such as the English Premier League. Therefore, they aggressively seek out the necessary customers to do so, including those in Ireland. This has consequences for Irish football in a number of different ways. Although the influence of media corporations contributes to the promotion of the English game globally, it damages the reputation of domestic football leagues in other countries. This is due to the comparatively mediocre media coverage offered by domestic television networks in countries such as Ireland when promoting their domestic league (McGovern, 2000).

This can be demonstrated by the fact that there is currently no formal television deal to show League of Ireland fixtures (McDonnell, 2018) when compared to Rugby or Gaelic games in Ireland. When the FAI negotiate their contract with Radio Telefís Éireann (the national public service broadcaster of Ireland) to show Republic of Ireland senior international fixtures, they ensure Ireland's professional league receives television coverage to promote the domestic game. This includes a late-night show for one hour per week during the League of Ireland season to review some of the fixtures played. Significantly however, the League of Ireland clubs receive no financial payment for this coverage (ibid).

In contrast, Sky's first agreement with the English Premier League in 1992 cost one hundred and ninety-one million pounds (Cashmore & Dixon, 2016). With Sky's owner Rupert Murdoch stating in 1996 that sport would be used as a 'battering ram' to expand his pay per view television network (Milliken, 1996; Parrish, 2003), it is not surprising to see the rights to show English Premier League football matches continuing to rise. The chasm that exists between domestic football in Ireland and that of England is further magnified by the four-billion-pound financial investment made by the broadcasters Sky and BT Sport to show English Premier League games for a three-year deal from 2019 (Conn, 2018). For broadcasters to pay this money, it reflects the appetite for English football across the globe (Stead & Maguire, 2000).

Broadcasting rights for television is however, a relatively new phenomenon and prior to the 1980's broadcasting was the responsibility of individual countries. Due to the deregulation of national broadcasting markets with a shift towards regulation by the European Union, the amount of commercial television broadcasters increased significantly from a small number in Europe to fifty-eight by the early 1990's (Parrish, 2003). This growth coincided with improved satellite technology providing the opportunity to commercialise football on a global scale increasing the number of fixtures for football fans to consume. These factors as well as the hierarchical structure of football placed a significant amount of negotiating power for television rights in the hands of football organisations such as FIFA, UEFA and leagues such as the English Premier League who had broken away from their respective national Football Association (European Commission, 1998). This increased revenue from television broadcasters continues to provide English Premier League teams in particular with the spending power to invest in players from other counties (herein referred to as 'foreign players') and the capability to pay high wages.

In recognition of the global exposure of the English game, marketing companies inevitably look to invest in this market because it can provide access to millions, if not billions of potential consumers using every form of media coverage from social networking, the internet, the print media and in particular television to promote their product. Some of the instruments used to promote a particular brand include football clubs, jerseys, boots, but the most significant is the professional athlete (Hickey & Kelly, 2008; Denham, 2009). However, footballers in the League of Ireland are not afforded the same social status as their peers in other football leagues such as England or even when compared to GAA or rugby players in Ireland. Moreover, the lack of interest in the domestic football league in Ireland is best illustrated by Section 162 of the Broadcasting Act, 2009. This legislation allows the Government Minister responsible for Communications to designate specific sports and cultural events of major importance to society, to be free on national television. However, no League of Ireland competitions (Premier division or FAI Cup) are listed as a designated event for Irish television, illustrating the positioning of domestic football in Irish sport and society.

In contrast, when a review of the list of designated events took place in 2017, the list included for the first-time women's Gaelic games. It was announced that the All-Ireland senior ladies Gaelic football and camogie finals were to be included because both are 'events of major importance to society' and it "confirms that they are of special resonance and have a distinct cultural importance for the people of Ireland" (Naughten, 2017, para 3). The importance of ladies' Gaelic football is certainly reflected in the attendance of the finals in Croke Park stadium in 2018 with over fifty thousand confirmed (RTE, 2018). Also included on the Free to Air designation list which has to be approved by the Irish Government and the European Commission were the men's All-Ireland Gaelic football and hurling finals, the Summer Olympics, international football matches, the Rugby World Cup, the Irish Grand National, the Irish Derby and the Nations Cup at the Dublin Horse Show. The position of domestic Irish football (shaped by social structures and cultural traditions) is exacerbated even further due to the lack of commercial interest in it as a viable product for which consumers are willing to pay. This is in contrast to the investment Sky has made to show European Rugby involving Irish teams and GAA fixtures in both hurling and Gaelic football.

1.4 Migration of Children in Football

There are five key professional football leagues in Europe: the English Premier League, the Spanish Primera Liga, the German Erste Bundesliga, Italian Serie A and the French Ligue 1

(Poli, 2010; Poli, Ravenel & Besson, 2015). To highlight the strength of these five leagues only two other teams from two different leagues in Europe have won the European Cup (now the UEFA Champions League) in over a quarter of a century since the 1991-1992 season. Therefore, these top five leagues in Europe attract young aspiring footballers from countries across the globe who see little option but to migrate to them in order to play at the highest level of football (Elliott, 2016). However, migration is not a new phenomenon for Irish players, who have been joining professional football clubs in the UK since the late eighteen hundred's in search of a better opportunity to ply their trade on a bigger stage (McGovern, 2000, 2002; Magee & Sugden, 2002; Elliott, 2016; Curran & Kelly, 2018).

One of the first Irish footballers to migrate to England was former Irish international John Peden who played for Newton Heath (now Manchester United) between 1893-1894 (Joyce, 2004). The recruitment of Irish players to English clubs like Manchester United remained strong throughout the twentieth century (McGovern, 2002) and included players such as Liam Whelan, Paul McGrath, Roy Keane and John O'Shea. By the time John O'Shea signed for Manchester United in 1999, it had become the norm to sign Irish players under eighteen years of age rather than spend money on buying players from the League of Ireland. Data gathered by McGovern (2000) found that prior to the 1980's English clubs focused on buying League of Ireland players. However, from 1985 this changed, and clubs began recruiting young players from amateur schoolboy clubs as this did not incur a transfer fee because no prior professional contract existed, resulting in cheaper labour (McGovern, 2000; Bourke, 2002). This emphasis on the recruitment of young Irish players by professional football clubs in the UK is a relatively new phenomenon and this continues to be the preferred recruitment practice in the twenty-first century.

It is now commonplace for children under eighteen to transfer across national boundaries in pursuit of their football career. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), regard people under eighteen years old as children and Ireland also recognises this (Child Care Act, 1991; Lalor, De Róiste & Devlin, 2007). Thus, the migration of children for football career reasons raises questions about standards and ethics. Coakley (2009, p. 131) suggests that sports such as football (soccer) use children as "revenue-producing sport machines" and he argues that in effect they then become child laborers. However, as children's rights have been enshrined into Irish law such as including their voice on issues that affect them, for example, Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989) and the Thirty-First Amendment of the

Constitution (Children) Act (2012), football authorities need to continually review the moral and ethical issues related to the international transfer of a child from one country to another (Donnelly & Petherick, 2004; Pitchford et al., 2004; Brackenridge et al., 2010). This is a particular issue for Irish children because they migrate to the UK from as young as sixteen years old, mostly due to the lack of full-time professional options for young footballers at club level in Ireland (Bourke, 2003).

Interestingly, the Scottish FA issued a decree as far back as 1975 prohibiting the movement of players to England until they had turned sixteen years of age (McGovern, 2002) due to the threat of poaching talented Scottish child footballers. In 1989, the European Parliament criticised the UEFA transfer system referring to it as a "latter-day version of the slave trade" (Morris, Morrow & Spink, 1996, p. 894). In fact, in 2010 the international transfer market was described as a mechanism used for deceitful and fraudulent activities such as money laundering, evading tax and exploiting minors (Hawkins, 2015). However, football is not unique in this sense with boxing also being referenced as legalised slavery (Wacquant, 2002).

In recognising the need to protect children from exploitation within football's global transfer market, FIFA has now set out its position using the FIFA Regulations on the Status and Transfer of Players (FIFA RSTP). Because Irish children are so heavily reliant on getting 'a move' to a professional football club abroad, it is necessary to examine why the FIFA RSTP were introduced in the first place and what impact these regulations have had on children participating in football when they migrate, if any? The FIFA RSTP were FIFA's response to a decision by the European Court of Justice in 1995 concerning a Belgian born footballer Jean-Marc Bosman (Parrish, 2003). Bosman who was out of contract with a Belgian professional football club called Royal Club Liégois SA in 1990, was being restricted from transferring to another football club (McGillivray, Fern & McIntosh, 2005). This was because football regulations at that time stipulated that a transfer fee was due to the football club the out-of-contract player was leaving.

The 'Bosman ruling' as it is now known, established that clubs who requested transfer fees for out-of-contract players, and leagues who implemented rules relating to quotas of 'foreign players', were fundamentally in breach of the right to freedom of European Union workers (Stead & Maguire, 2000; INEUM Consulting & TAJ, 2007; Relvas et al., 2010; Richardson et al., 2012; Roderick, 2013). Bosman's case was a landmark decision by the European Court of

Justice which led to a dispute between FIFA, UEFA and the European Commission in relation to how international transfers in football were to be regulated (Parrish, 2003). It took six years for the European Court of Justice's decision to be implemented when, with the agreement of the European Commission, FIFA's Executive Committee adopted the FIFA Regulations on the Status and Transfer of Players in 2001 (Parish, 2003). The 2001 Regulations introduced inter alia, a code of conduct in relation to the international transfer of players under eighteen. In 2005, FIFA amended the Regulations to include a specific Article dealing with the 'Protection of minors' (currently Article 19 of the FIFA RSTP, 2018). This Article was significant as it changed the landscape of the football environment by prohibiting the international transfer of minors (children) under the age of eighteen.

The rationale behind an international transfer ban relating to under eighteens is an attempt to prevent the exploitation of children for the purposes of football. However, an outright ban was difficult to impose and as a result, FIFA introduced three exceptions. Two of the exceptions, Article 19 (2) (a) and (c), ensured the child remained with their family, for example, if parents were moving to a country for reasons not linked to football or if the child lived less than one hundred kilometres from the club they are transferring to. The third exception, Article 19 (2) (b), was similar to the Bosman case as it related to the freedom of movement of workers within the European Union. As a result, the regulations stipulate that a minor/child can transfer within the territory of the European Union or the European Economic Area (EU/EEA) if they have turned sixteen years of age (FIFA RSTP, 2018). Under these circumstances, the new club the child is migrating to must take additional provisions which comply with, Article 19 (2) (b) of the FIFA RSTP (2018) before FIFA will accept the international transfer of a minor. These additional provisions include the following:

i. It shall provide the player with an adequate football education and/ or training in line with the highest national standards.
ii. It shall guarantee the player an academic and/or school and/or vocational education and/or training, in addition to his football education and/or training, which will allow the player to pursue a career other than football should he cease playing professional football.
iii. It shall make all necessary arrangements to ensure that the player is looked after in the best possible way (optimum living standards with a host family or in club accommodation, appointment of a mentor at the club, etc.).

iv. It shall, on registration of such a player, provide the relevant association with proof that it is complying with the aforementioned obligations.

(FIFA RSTP, 2018, p. 22)

FIFA also introduced an online application called the Transfer Matching System (TMS) in 2010 to regulate global international transfers electronically. Hawkins (2015, p. 164) interviewed Mark Goddard, general manager of FIFA's TMS who explained the importance of protecting minors with particular emphasis on children remaining with their family because "under-18s moving to other parts of the planet…can potentially go very wrong". The aim of FIFA TMS is to improve "transparency and the flow of information" (FIFA RSTP, 2018, p. 6). As a result, both the football club the player is moving to and from, and the Football Associations they are affiliated with, are required to upload specific information requested by FIFA before a transfer can be processed.

To ensure Article 19 (2) (b) is being complied with for example, up to thirty pieces of information have to be submitted to the TMS system before FIFA will accept the transfer (Hawkins, 2015). This includes, inter alia, written proof of the child's football training regime, the school and subjects they will be taking as well as the accommodation they will be living in. However, there is limited scrutiny of the information provided. For example, satisfying Article 19 (2) (b) (ii), proof of attending school, involves up-loading a letter from the school the child will be attending, listing the timetable and the subjects they will be taking. An education professional does not examine the current education of the child to ensure continuity or question the transferability of the qualifications they will receive whilst in a football academy should they have to return to their home country following deselection. In fact, the school the child attends is not physically checked by FIFA but more importantly, no oversight is in existence to examine the qualifications young players actually receive, if any. Article 19 (2) (b) (iii) which concerns accommodation is also validated with a letter through TMS and again there is no physical inspection from any FIFA representative to review the suitability of its "optimum living standards" (FIFA RSTP, 2018, p. 22).

Young footballers also need to consider the competition they will face when they migrate to the professional football environment. For instance, young talented Irish footballers who may have reached elite levels within their age category in Ireland, are not guaranteed success as a

professional footballer in one of the top five European leagues. The career path to first-team professional football is complex and difficult in the twenty-first century for two key reasons. The first point concerns the increased competition to access professional football academies due to the global recruitment strategies of professional football clubs (Calvin, 2017; Wallace, 2017). Secondly, even if players do progress through a professional football academy, there has been a significant influx of foreign players into first-team squads in European leagues (Poli, Ravenel & Besson, 2016a) making career progression for young footballers even more difficult.

The Bosman ruling, particularly the freedom of movement of players and the removal of a provision which insisted on a quota to restrict the number of foreign players in each club/team has changed the dynamic of the 'big five' European leagues (Magee & Sugden, 2002; Relvas et al., 2010; Littlewood, Mullen & Richardson, 2011; Jarvie, 2012; Kelly, 2014; Poli, Ravenel & Besson, 2016a). Poli, Ravenel and Besson (2016b) found that up until 1985, none of the five major European leagues ever exceeded 10% of foreign players and during the last season before the Bosman ruling, the influx of foreign players had reached just over 18% (1995/96 season). However, following the Bosman decision in 1995, this figure increased significantly to over 35% in the 2000/01 season. Fifteen years later this has now exceeded 46% resulting in an extremely competitive environment for young emerging footballers.

Focusing specifically on the English Premier League, as this is the league to which most Irish players migrate, at the start of the 1992/93 season there were only eleven foreign players, increasing to three hundred and fifty-eight registered foreign players in the 2008/09 season (Elliott & Weedon, 2011). Research completed by Poli, Ravenel and Besson (2016b) also found that in the 2015/2016 season foreign players accounted for 66% of all players in the English Premier League. Indeed, out of the five hundred and ninety-seven football players under the age of eighteen who migrated across the globe, one hundred and eighty went to England which accounts for 30.1% (Poli, Ravenel & Besson, 2016b). Of the countries who exported these players to England, unsurprisingly Ireland was fourth with eleven players (Sweden was first with sixteen and Northern Ireland was sixteenth exporting six players).

The increase in foreign players (children and adults) in leagues such as the English Premier League strengthens the argument for football clubs in countries such as Ireland to train and develop young players rather than exporting them at sixteen years of age. Moreover, Football

Associations are now putting pressure on their professional football clubs to develop home based player to ensure a pool of players are developed to progress to first team international football (Relvas et al., 2010). Developing players in their own country also allows children to remain with their family, friends and the opportunity to pursue a dual career in a system they are familiar with. This process has started in Ireland with significant changes being made to improve the elite player pathway for underage footballers. As previously mentioned, in August 2017, a national league for under fifteens was commenced with a total of twenty-four-teams (FAI, 2016b). Young Irish footballers are now provided with an underage football pathway at national level linking in with the existing under seventeen national league and an under nineteen national league. There are also plans to introduce an under thirteen national league in 2019. However, because the FAI's underage national leagues are in their infancy and because they do not provide full-time football, an Irish child may still feel the personal and financial lure of English football.

1.5 Structural Factors influencing Migration

It appears on the surface that, from a policy and regulatory viewpoint, FIFA has put in place all the necessary safeguards to protect children from being exploited, particularly when they are moving from one country to another. However, in accordance with the FIFA RSTP (2018), the professional football club the player is moving to, is obliged to pay training compensation to clubs who developed the player (from the age of twelve up to a maximum of twenty-one years of age) before the international transfer can take place. Training compensation was introduced by FIFA in 2001 as a result of the Bosman Ruling and it is due when "a player signs his first contract as a professional" (FIFA RSTP, 2018, p. 25). Therefore, it could be said that the very regulations aimed at preventing children from transferring internationally and protecting those who do, also actively promotes the movement of children abroad through a compensation payment. Consequently, it is in the financial interests of Irish amateur schoolboy clubs to harvest and export their best young players to generate this training compensation payment rather than develop the players themselves in Ireland after the age of sixteen. Therefore, this section will examine how football networks form in Irish schoolboy football to facilitate children moving abroad.

It is important to note that the potential financial gain generated from training compensation should not take precedence over any negative impact on the development of a child socially, culturally or academically. Moving a child from one country to another without their family

needs careful consideration as doing so could be considered as exploitation (Donnelly & Petherick, 2004; Darby, Akindes & Kirwin, 2007; Calvin, 2017). Poli, Ravenel and Besson (2016a) also note that the international migration of football players before the age of eighteen poses serious risks for the footballer due to the speculative nature and slim chances of making a career out of professional football. They add further that a driving force behind the increase of minors flowing between countries across the world is due to numerous actors, for example, scouts and agents/intermediaries who make their living out of player transfers (ibid). The practice of harvesting players for the export market is particularly evident in many of the elite schoolboy clubs who play in the Dublin and District Schoolboys League (DDSL) such as Belvedere, Home Farm, Cherry Orchard, St Kevin's Boys, St Joseph's Boys and Stella Maris (Maher, 2015). This results in these elite schoolboy clubs targeting the best players from other Irish schoolboy clubs to join them. In some cases, formal (and informal) agreements are put in place between an English professional football club and an Irish schoolboy club. This provides the English professional football club with easy access to some of the best young footballers in Ireland (Kelly, 2014).

As a consequence, it is no coincidence then that young Irish footballers flock to Dublin clubs with these types of agreements in place such as St. Kevin's Boys who entered into a relationship with West Bromwich Albion, St. Josephs Boys who established a relationship with Sheffield United, Home Farm who had links with both Everton and Leeds, Stella Maris with Tranmere Rovers, Cherry Orchard with Manchester City, Belvedere with Millwall and Shelbourne with Manchester United. The potential exposure these Irish schoolboy clubs offer to access the professional football market in the UK is a very attractive prospect for young Irish footballers. Research also highlights many examples of English clubs utilising an Irish gatekeeper to access children in the Irish football market such as former Irish internationals (McGovern, 2000, 2002). The use of former senior Irish international players is an obvious way to maximise access and opportunities due to the profile and prestige they hold within the football family in Ireland.

When former Irish international Liam Brady was Director of Youth Development with Arsenal, he established a formal relationship with the DDSL. This agreement provided Arsenal with access to what is argued to be the biggest league in Europe for underage players with over two hundred clubs and sixteen thousand players (Kelly, 2014). Agreements of this nature could only be achieved with close relationships between all involved. According to Lang (2010, p.

21), this supports Foucault's position, suggesting that "individuals are enmeshed in a web of power created by discourse, which operates within the daily exchanges between individuals, groups and institutions". The forming of allegiances and constructing networks in Irish football benefits professional football clubs as they are getting a cheap young player and the Irish schoolboy club are receiving a financial payment in the form of training compensation.

Training compensation is the only significant cost a professional football club abroad may incur to acquire the services of a young Irish player. The calculation of the training compensation depends on the jurisdiction of the club a player signs his first professional contract with. If for example an Irish player signs a professional contract with a League of Ireland club, then the payments detailed in the FAI's Domestic Training Compensation regulations apply (FAI, 2014). However, this domestic payment (€1,400 for four years – from their twelfth birthday up to their sixteenth birthday) is significantly lower than the training compensation an Irish schoolboy club would receive if an individual signed as a professional footballer with a club in a different jurisdiction. In these cases, rather than Domestic Training Compensation, FIFA's training compensation payments are applicable. Ordinarily the calculation of this training compensation is capped by FIFA at ten thousand euro per season from the players twelfth up to and including their fifteenth birthday. However, Annexe 4, Article 6 (1) (a) of the FIFA RSTP (2018) provides a different calculation of training compensation if a player moves from one association to another inside the territory of the EU/EEA. This is because an international transfer of this nature can occur at sixteen years of age.

If this transfer involves a move from a lower category club to a higher category club in a different EU/EEA country then "the calculation shall be based on the average training costs of the two clubs" (FIFA RSTP, 2018, p. 69). FIFA's circular letters no. 959 and 959a (FIFA, 2005), are used to establish the training costs for developing players on a confederation basis. Within each confederation, it is the responsibility of each Football Association to allocate their football clubs a category ranging from one to four. To put this into context, Ireland has no category one football clubs, however League of Ireland premier division clubs are category two clubs and all schoolboy clubs are category four. An example of a category one club includes all English Premier League clubs. In European football all category one professional football clubs are assigned the sum of ninety thousand euro to train a player for one season; whereas an Irish schoolboy club (category four) is assigned ten thousand euro per season to train a player.

Therefore, to calculate the training compensation fee for a player who moves from an Irish schoolboy club to an English Premier League club, the average cost of the two clubs to train the player is used, which in this instance is fifty thousand euro per season. This fee has to be paid for each season a player was registered with a category four club. This is calculated from the age of twelve up to the season of their twenty-first birthday or if they sign their first professional contract before this period, which for Irish players is generally sixteen years of age. At sixteen, this amounts to four full seasons and therefore the total amount a category one club should have to pay in training compensation to an Irish schoolboy club will be two hundred thousand euro per player. A category two club in England (allocated sixty thousand euro per year by FIFA to train a player) would have to pay an Irish schoolboy club thirty-five thousand per season which amounts to one hundred and forty thousand euro per player for four seasons. Although these fees may seem excessive, they are cheap in comparison to buying a fully-fledged, off the shelf professionally contracted player from another professional football club.

The issue in Irish football does not concern the amount of training compensation due to Irish schoolboy clubs because this is what they are entitled to in accordance with FIFA's regulations. Moreover, it is accepted that this money is vital for the game to continue developing, however anecdotally, how this money is reinvested back into the Irish game by schoolboy clubs has raised serious concerns. If we consider a schoolboy club like Belvedere who participate in the DDSL as a case in point. Belvedere are traditionally one of the biggest schoolboy clubs in Ireland who have a strong tradition of developing players who migrate to professional football clubs in the UK. In fact, it has managed to develop over two hundred international players from under fifteen to senior level including players such as Wes Hoolahan and Richard Sadlier (Belvedere Football Club, 2018). This is an extraordinary achievement for a club who in 2018 still has no facilities of its own (Ryan, 2018) but continues to produce players to such a high standard.

1.6 Making the Move Abroad

With money involved in the transfer of children, Irish schoolboy football can be a lucrative business involving agents, scouts and representatives from professional football clubs working to ensure the child 'seizes their only opportunity' as it is often referred (Hannigan, 1998). This is an example of figurational theory in operation as they are all dependent on each other (Dunning, 2001). When an Irish player agrees to migrate to a professional football club, generally, there are two types of contract they can sign; a full professional contract or a scholar

contract. In accordance with Article 2 (2) of the FIFA RSTP (2018, p. 9) it states that a professional is a player "who has a written contract with a club and is paid more for his footballing activity than the expenses he effectively incurs". Therefore, it is important to recognise that even though a scholar contract is considered a lower level type of contract when compared to a 'full' professional contract, it still changes a player's status from amateur to professional. This change of status occurs when an international transfer is processed through FIFA TMS triggering the training compensation payment.

Although, it is financially beneficial for an Irish schoolboy club when a player that was registered with them migrates to the UK, the majority of contracts signed by sixteen-year-old Irish footballers are scholar contracts. This places them in a very weak position financially as they receive £145 per week with an increase to £155 in the second year (Wallace, 2017). This highlights the power of the professional football clubs as young Irish players generally accept these financial conditions without exception. Although players who are on scholar contracts are provided with accommodation and an academic education, questions have been raised concerning the wage these young players receive and if it meets minimum wage requirements in the UK (Wallace, 2017). With less than 1% of players making it as a first team professional footballer (Calvin, 2017), the professional football club can review young players' development over a couple of years to decide if they will keep them without incurring any significant financial costs. Additional concerns have been raised concerning the education young players receive particularly as 99% will not be full-time professional footballers.

An additional consideration for young talented Irish footballers concerns the type of club they migrate to. As previously mentioned, professional football clubs are categorised by their Football Associations for FIFA training compensation purposes, however, English football clubs are also assigned a category status for the academy they offer young players (Calvin, 2017). The categories of football academies range from category one to category four and the distinction between them is determined by what they provide in terms of facilities, coach qualifications, the type of academic programmes they offer and their staffing model such as the availability of education and welfare officers, sports science professionals, physiotherapists and doctors (Relvas et al., 2010; Premier League, 2011). This type of structuring also exists in countries such as France, Belgium, Finland and Germany where each Football Association clearly defines guidelines to ensure high quality development systems exist in their football academies (Relvas et al., 2010). Within the English football system, fifteen out of twenty

Premier League clubs (tier one of the English football pyramid) and nine Championship clubs (tier two of English football) have category one Elite Player Performance Plan academy status (Conn, 2017). As players move down through the football pyramid, so too do the standards of what clubs have to offer young players in their academies.

Therefore, if a sixteen-year-old Irish player has a choice of club, they may choose one that has a category one academy status because it can offer a vast range of facilities to maximise their football development. Whereas other players may choose a club with a category two academy status who are in lower leagues such as the Championship or League one (tier three of English football), trading better facilities for a gamble on accessing first team professional football quicker (Johnson, 2018). For some young talented footballers however, they may have no choice as only one club may offer a contract. This is significant because with only one option available players may feel pressurised to migrate at a young age even though the conditions may not be right for them.

When young talented footballers make the move to a professional football club abroad, they leave behind a life that is familiar for an uncertain future without the support of friends and family (Roderick, 2013). Although Stevenson (2001, p. 88) suggests that "individuals are actively engaged in the development of their own social lives", the move to a new country and the adjustment to a full-time professional football environment may be an event they are not adequately prepared for. Many Irish players who leave Ireland at a young age noted that loneliness and being homesick were significant issues they had to deal with having left friends and families (Woods, Buckley & Kirrane, 2005; Curran, 2015a). A key factor is the limited power young Irish players have when they migrate to the professional football environment. In contrast, Stead and Maguire (2000) identified in their research that Nordic/Scandinavian players who migrated to England in their twenties were more mature as a player and a person and therefore were better prepared for the cultural adjustment without friends and family.

For young footballers, the structure of the professional football academy (although they might not realise it) forces them to act and behave in a specific way. For example, in a full-time professional football environment, players are told when to eat, what to eat, where to train, how to train and what education courses they should take. In principle, they are slaves to the trade of professional football as their basic daily functions are controlled by the football club they are signed to. This power allows football academies or modern-day sporting panopticons, to

expand their power into every facet of the footballer's lives, moulding them into the kind of obedient workers that they want. The coaches in professional football clubs ranging from the first team coach right down to the academy coaches use the football structure to enhance their power to achieve their own goals using the bodies of a collective group of players. Foucault (1977, p. 221) viewed the penal system as a "subtle, calculated, technology of subjection" and who could argue against the similarities of the football system in the twenty-first century.

This environment cultivates a type of consciousness which shape players' behaviour because of the uncertainty it proselytizes and the fear of failure professional footballers face (Roderick, 2006a; Kelly, 2014). The constant surveillance which is built into every aspect of their lives intensifies the focus of becoming a footballer and similar findings were identified in professional boxing (Wacquant, 1995). The reality of course is that it does not matter how hard they try, the power that decides their future depends on the opinions of a select few and the influences of many complex factors such as injury, the increase in competition from other players or the sacking of a manager (Bourke, 2003). The vulnerability and uncertainty this creates can place pressure on players to conform to the attitudes and beliefs of this system. This can be particularly important for a player in shaping their attitudes and access to an alternative career away from football.

If the ethos of the football academy is disparaging towards a career after football, then this can influence attitudes to believe education is unnecessary. (Parker, 2000, 2001, 2006; Richardson, Littlewood & Gilbourne, 2004; Cushion & Jones, 2006; McGillivray, 2006; Christensen & Sørensen, 2009; Platts & Smith, 2009, 2018; Kelly, 2014). As a consequence, young players who migrate from Ireland may fail to prepare sufficiently for a career after football. Therefore, they may find being released from a professional football club and their return home to Ireland even more difficult. Intriguingly, even though young Irish players are central to the generation of the training compensation fee, none of this money is used to assist them to reintegrate back into Irish society when they are released by a professional football club. However, it could be argued that the responsibility for preparing these players for a career after football simply rests with the professional football club they join as this is already provided for in Article 19 (2) (b) (ii) of the FIFA RSTP (2018).

1.7 Summary

Bourdieu (1988) argues that you cannot examine the individual without having an understanding of the structures in society and vice versa. Having examined the development of football and its global impact on culture, we can begin to formulate the reasons why young talented footballers migrate to professional football leagues in countries like England. We can also understand some of the powerful networks that drive the football industry particularly those involved in the movement of young footballers due to training compensation. The regulations concerning the movement of young players developed from the 1995 Bosman ruling by the European Court of Justice, have contributed to football clubs investing more money to identify and develop young players (Williams & Reilly, 2000). However, others suggest that the ruling has precipitated clubs to invest in what is referred to as an off the shelf complete player who has experience, rather than invest in young untried players who may be a higher risk (Relvas et al., 2010; Jarvie, 2012; Curran & Kelly, 2018).

In fact, it could be argued that these two factors have contributed to a reduction in the opportunities for young Irish footballers to progress to first-team football with professional football clubs abroad. This is because the recruitment strategy of professional football clubs is now global in nature and accessing academies is extremely competitive (Jarvie, 2012; Güllich, 2014). Moreover, the spending power of professional football clubs has increased due to commercial revenue, reducing opportunities for players who are using the academy system to access first team football. This situation is heightened further due to the cultural significance attributed to becoming a professional footballer; however, it is clear that the career decision-making process is significantly more complex than simply matching ability to a profession (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Finally, it is acknowledged that football does contribute to many positive social, cultural and economic outcomes, however we are reminded that "[p]rofessional football clubs are service enterprises engaged in the business of performance, entertainment and financial profit" (Relvas et al., 2010, p. 165).

Chapter 2

The theoretical positioning of the elite child footballers and their career choice

2.0 Introduction to Careership Theory

Having already examined the historical development of football in chapter one, the purpose of this chapter is to introduce a theoretical framework that helps us to understand how individuals subjectively develop a connection to organised football. This will be achieved by examining how individuals engage with football particularly its key stakeholders and to explore the decision-making process to become a professional footballer. To do so, this research will draw on careership theory introduced by Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson (1996) which is framed by three key principles that contribute to our understanding of how individuals make career decisions. Firstly, it notes that decisions are pragmatically rational, secondly, they involve social interaction with individuals who have an influence on the decision-making process and thirdly, they are influenced by time due to the unpredictable transitory nature of career construction and progression (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997; Hodkinson, 1998, 2008).

Careership theory also argues that the career decision-making process is integral to a person's sense of identity including the process of refining or reforming who they are (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996). Therefore, using the three principles outlined in careership theory, this chapter will examine how pursuing a career in professional football shapes a young footballer's identity. To do so, this chapter will focus on four key elements: (1) children's involvement in the sports system, (2) the role of parents, (3) the desire to develop expertise and (4) balancing a dual career. Careership theory draws on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and this chapter will also use his work to understand how these four elements interact with the career decision-making process.

This chapter also draws on a number of studies that have applied careership theory to research, in fields such as: education (Daouda & Puaca, 2011; Lidström, Holm & Lundström, 2014; Lundahl et al., 2017), football (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2014; Andersson & Barker-Ruchti, 2018), school to work transition (Ball, Maguire & Macrae, 2000; Atkins, 2017), as well as migration and employment (Alexander, 2016). Additionally, to support the application of careership theory in this research, a number of additional theoretical models will be used throughout the chapter. Of particular note will be Schlossberg's (1981) model for analyzing human adaptation

to transition, Scanlon and Doyle's (2018) model for supported transition and Côté's developmental model of sport participation (Côté, 1999; Côté, Baker & Abernethy, 2007). The latter is particularly useful in providing three distinct developmental stages that can be applied to the career construction process. These stages include the sampling (ages six – twelve), specialising (ages thirteen – fifteen), and investment (ages sixteen and up) years (Côté, 1999; Soberlak & Côté, 2003; Côté, Baker & Abernethy, 2007; Stambulova et al., 2009; Côté, Lidor & Hackfort, 2009). Finally, as children transition through these stages, specific support may be necessary and therefore the models developed by Schlossberg (1981) and Scanlon and Doyle (2018) will be applied.

2.1 Forming Career Decisions

A key component of careership theory is its interpretation of how career decisions are made and the subsequent career progression that follows (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996). One of the central arguments of careership theory is that career decisions are pragmatic rather than systematic and this is underpinned by two overlapping concepts; habitus and horizons for action (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997; Hodkinson, 1998, 2008). Therefore, this section will examine these two concepts in relation to their role in influencing the career decision-making processes of Irish underage international footballers. In addition to this, Bourdieu's (1992) conceptualisation of practice is particularly useful to help understand the pragmatic process of decision-making because he argues that one of the key components that gives the lived world its structure is "the schemata of perception and understanding" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 247). To explain this further, Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997, p. 34) suggest that from childhood, young people interpret their surroundings through amassing schemata "by filtering out 'irrelevancies' and allowing sense to be made of partial information". This follows that knowledge is constructed within a "socially constituted system of structured and structuring dispositions acquired in practice" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 121). Therefore, our career decisions are based on experiences that influence and are influenced by our habitus and our horizons for action.

2.1.1 Habitus

Bourdieu's concept of habitus refers to an individual's sense of "how to act and respond in the course of their daily lives" (Mills, 2008, p. 80). It develops over time through engagement in a variety of settings and is influenced by social, economic and cultural contexts (Hodkinson,

Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997; Hodkinson, 1998, 2008; Bloomer & Hodkinson, 2000; Light & Kirk, 2000; Stead & Maguire, 2000; Bowman, Colley & Hodkinson, 2004; Lidström, Holm & Lundström, 2014; Atkins, 2017). This is of particular importance because careership theory posits that career decisions cannot be separated from culture, family background or the life histories of individuals, contributing to their pragmatically rational nature (Hodkinson, 1998). In contrast, technically rational decisions are logical and discursive involving a logical train of thought about the self and the labour market (Hodkinson, 2008). However, pragmatically rational decisions are less linear and logical and more embodied and emotional (ibid). Just as habitus is an embodiment of individual agency and social structure, it is this unique marriage of subjectivity and objectivity that makes career decisions pragmatically rational rather than technically rational. Careership theory suggests that "[t]he habitus of an individual acts as the means through which the lifestyle is pragmatically chosen, and it modifies as the lifestyle develops" (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996, pp. 146-147). Therefore, for a young talented Irish footballer, his parents and family as well as the culture of the football system, play a significant role in shaping his habitus (McGillivray, Fearn & McIntosh, 2005), which in turn informs the pragmatic rationality of the decisions taken to become a professional footballer.

Continuing to draw on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997, p. 33) explain that a person's habitus is "individually subjective but also influenced by the objective social networks and cultural traditions in which that person lives". This relationship between subjectivity and objectivity shapes the way individuals see themselves and how they believe others view them, that is, their subjective position in society (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Careership theory argues that the family is central to how we develop our subjective position and plays a significant role in different aspects of our lives (Hodkinson, 1998; Daouda & Puaca, 2011) including career decision-making processes (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997; Hodkinson, 1998, 2008; Ball, Maguire & Macrae, 2000; Lidström, Holm & Lundström, 2014; Atkins, 2017). This is because during a child's early years, they are largely dependent on their parents (Dunning, 2001; Tremayne & Tremayne, 2004) and "[t]he emotional and moral environment in which children grow up is…carefully engineered by their caregivers" (Blackburn, 2008, pp. 3-4).

Atkins (2017), also drawing on Bourdieu, suggests that each family possesses its own unique capital; social, economic and cultural. Therefore, a young child is socialised to internalise

certain family beliefs and behaviours, for example, conscious and unconscious prejudices or certain religious beliefs (Gargan, 2016). This socialisation process is strongly influenced by the opportunity's caregivers present to their children from an early age, which are shaped by cultural and socioeconomic factors (Frey & Eitzen, 1991; Ball, Maguire & Macrae, 2000; Tremayne & Tremayne, 2004). An example of this includes the role parents play in introducing their child to organised sport whilst also providing ongoing support should they continue to participate (Bloom, 1985; Frey & Eitzen, 1991; Côté, 1999; Bourke, 2003; Coakley, 2009; Harwood & Knight, 2009; O'Rourke et al., 2011).

Coakley (2006, p. 159) suggests that many parents see participation in sport as an "important part of their children's overall socialization". This often reflects parents' deep human investment in their children (Coakley, 1998; Gute et al., 2008; Harwood & Knight, 2009) which plays a significant role in shaping the habitus through accumulated experiences. Coakley (2006, p. 161) refers to 'family habitus' when considering commitment and moral worth within the context of youth sports suggesting that it "subsumes activities that parents think will best facilitate the development of their children". Therefore, sporting organisations frequently attempt to convince parents that they have the best facilities, the best trained coaches or their sport is safer than others. One of the reasons for the growth of formal sport may be attributed to parents' concerns about the dangers that surround their children; what Furedi (2001) refers to as "parental paranoia" (cited in Brackenridge et al., 2007, p.14). Rather than letting children play on their own, parents bring their children to what Pitchford (2007b, p. 14) terms "islands of childhood" from a very young age. These are sporting and recreational environments that parents perceive to be safe, organised and supervised. Parents often believe they are responsible for the achievements or failures of their children and not providing them with every opportunity to access these sporting environments can cause guilt and concern (Coakley, 2006).

To understand the influence early participation in sports such as football can have in shaping a child's habitus and perhaps consequently informing the pragmatic decision to pursue a career as a professional footballer, there are two key factors to consider. First of all, we need to consider how early children engage with specialised sports programmes and secondly how immersion in these environments influences attitudes to other aspects of their life such as academic work. Tannenbaum (1992, pp. 9-10), for example, highlights that many children who are labelled as prodigies from an early age often become a "flash-in-the-pan" and / or suffer what is commonly referred to as "early ripe, early rot". The consequence of identifying children

too early as ‘talented’ and immersing them in a specialised sport programme has the potential to limit their holistic development constraining how they perceive their social reality or what careership theory refers to as their horizons for action (discussed in more detail in section 2.1.2) (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997; Hodkinson, 1998, 2008; Ball, Maguire & Macrae, 2000). Although, it is important to note that this ‘social reality’ does not ‘determine’ the choices individuals make or how they act, it does play a role influencing their decisions. These decisions take place in a complex relationship between habitus and objective conditions (Alexander, 2016).

Early specialisation is increasingly apparent in professional football academies in the UK, where school, work and high-performance football development are facilitated on the same campus. Traditionally in football clubs, specialisation began at fifteen or sixteen (Johnson, 2018) but now children as young as six years of age are signing what are commonly referred to as pre-agreement contracts with professional football clubs in England (Calvin, 2017). This is to prevent them joining other clubs when they are officially allowed to sign with a professional football club at eight years of age. When children enter this environment, it can have a significant impact on their habitus and set the scene for very early pragmatically rational thinking that a career as professional football is possible. This may involve pressure to conform to a specific habitus, that is, a specific way of thinking and behaving based on the environment or field they find themselves in.

It is argued that once young people choose a specific career path, the socialisation process limits their focus to a narrow set of goals and ambitions (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). When children move into sporting environments, Wright, MacDonald and Groom (2003, p. 19, emphasis in original) suggest that “certain sports are deliberately cultivated to produce a specific *habitus*, a specific embodied relation to the world”. This means that children identify with specific sports and this enables them to make sense of their embodied position in the world and of their embodied trajectory. Sport can greatly influence and shape our lives based on certain beliefs or ways of thinking. For example, Parker (2006, p. 692) found that young trainee footballers who were committed to pursuing a successful career in football “felt compelled to adhere to the social expectations of the hyper-masculine culture within which they lived and worked”. This was demonstrated by an ‘anti-school attitude’ which the young trainee footballers (who predominantly came from working class backgrounds) saw as essential for

the construction of their masculine identity (ibid). What emerged was a specific habitus that drew upon individual and collective identity.

Therefore, the pragmatic nature of the career decision-making process is encapsulated by the fact that an individual's habitus is developed through schemata which are conceptual structures amassed over time to help understand our experiences. This influences how individuals see themselves, thus changing their perception of the world (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Careership theory notes that habitus plays a central role is how a person's schematic beliefs are developed because they are being managed by the individuals subjective but also "permeated by the objective social structures and cultural or sub-cultural traditions in which that person lives" (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996, p. 146). Consequently, careership theory argues that the perceptions of individuals are rooted in their identity which is shaped by their life history, interaction with significant others and sociological and cultural experiences (Hodkinson, 1998). Interestingly, Strauss (1962, p. 66) noted that this "transformation of perception is irreversible" and as a result, what is possible, in terms of career choice is "based on structural possibilities and the individuals' socially and culturally bounded habitus" (Lidström, Holm & Lundström, 2014, p. 15).

2.1.2 Shaping our horizons

A concept central to careership theory is called 'horizons for action' (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997; Hodkinson, 1998; 2008; Ball, Maguire & Macrae, 2000; Atkins, 2017; Andersson & Barker-Ruchti, 2018). Horizon is a metaphor taken from vision and it is argued in careership theory that these horizons enable us to see anything within them but prevents or constrains us from seeing what lies beyond them, shaping the decisions we formulate and the actions we take (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997; Hodkinson, 1998, 2008; Ball, Maguire & Macrae, 2000; Atkins, 2017; Lundahl et al., 2017). The reason horizons for action is so important to careership theory is because it reinforces the argument that career decisions are not merely technically rational, instead postulating that they are always pragmatically rational.

> The central idea in Careership theory is that career decision-making and progression take place in the interactions between the person and the fields they inhabit. Thus,

> career decision-making and progression are bounded by a person's horizons for action. (Hodkinson, 2008, p. 4)

The application of horizons for action provides a deeper understanding of how individuals make decisions rather than having "a polarised explanation focused either on social structures or individual free choice" (Hodkinson, 1998, p. 100). Choosing any career is complex (Foskett & Hemsley-Brown, 1999; Foskett, Dyke & Maringe, 2008; Coupland, 2015; Andersson & Barker-Ruchti, 2018) and this is illustrated by young footballers who aspire to become professional footballers (McGillivray, Fern & McIntosh, 2005). Having already considered habitus in section 2.1.1, this section will examine how sports, particularly football, create an objective reality through which children decide to become professional footballers. Whether the creation of this objective reality enables or constrains young footballers' career decisions is subject to debate.

As previously discussed, our schemata are in a constant state of flux, continuously being formed and reformed by new experiences and information. This shapes our understanding of and ability to interpret the world around us including what we perceive to be possible and appropriate from a career perspective (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Careership theory argues that our schemata both limits and enables how we understand because we are adding new information to previously held information (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996). As a consequence, this creates "the arena within which actions can be taken and decisions made" (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997, p. 35). This is what careership theory holds as central to horizons for action, that is, how individuals' view the objective world from their perspective (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997; Hodkinson, 1998, 2008; Ball, Maguire & Macrae, 2000; Lidström, Holm & Lundström, 2014; Atkins, 2017). Just as Bourdieu asserts that "the viewpoints of agents will vary systematically with the point they occupy in objective social space" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 11), similarly horizons for action will vary depending on the position occupied by young footballers in the objective social space, that is, the football environment.

Sports, including football, are an excellent example of an objective social space created and maintained through social and cultural affirmation. Applying the concept horizons for action provides a mechanism to understand and interpret how career decisions might be made. This is because horizons for action incorporates two overlapping elements in order to understand

career opportunities; subjectivity and objectivity. (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). For example, career choice can only take place based on the interaction an individual has with the context that is specific to them, that is, the field(s) they inhabit (Alexander, 2016) including the resources they possess to exert influence on their own futures.

> But that influence can only be understood as part of complex interactions . . . it is helpful to see all the players making pragmatically rational decisions, from their own differing standpoints, within their own differing horizons and with their own differing objectives. (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997, p. 37)

It is accepted that individuals have an influence over their own future and this is demonstrated by research completed by Stevenson (2001) who investigated the decision-making process to become an international athlete. However, he also found that the career journey to become a professional athlete was unpredictable and talent was simply not enough because success required "being in the right place at the right time, being seen by the right people, taking advantage of opportunities when they become available" (Stevenson, 2001, p. 94). Therefore, for young Irish footballers whose horizons for action are set on becoming a professional footballer, they will most likely evaluate their social reality and make pragmatically rational decisions to ensure they maximise every opportunity to achieve their career aspirations. This may include leaving their family to migrate to a professional football club rather than stay in Ireland.

Interestingly, Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000) used 'time and place' to anchor the concept horizons for action, in order to contextualise the narratives of the participants in their study. This allowed Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000) to use the time period and location (South London) that their participants grew up in to demonstrate how it shaped their perception of their life choices including their career. Chapter one of this dissertation detailed the economic and political landscape of football and how it has transformed from humble beginnings to a global giant in the twenty-first century. It is necessary to see that time and place play key roles in how young players' horizons for action are shaped and consequently the type of career decisions they might make in the future. The research completed by Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000) reinforces a key point in careership theory that career decision-making cannot be separated from the historical context of individuals including economic, social and cultural

factors. Therefore, when examining young footballers' decisions to choose professional football as a career, there is a need to understand the context of children's relationship with football and how this has evolved historically as well as to "focus on what is happening at the time the research is conducted" (Hodkinson, 2008, p. 8).

Understanding the context of young footballers' horizons for action should support them in working towards a dual career. A report commissioned by the Directorate General for Education and Culture of the European Commission (with PMP Consultancy) in 2004, examined 'The Education of Young Elite Sportspersons' in all twenty-five Member States of the European Union (Amara et al., 2004). The scope of this European report was broad as it reviewed the education available to elite athletes from "compulsory education, through post-compulsory, further education, higher education/university provision and professional sports academies, to vocational training for post-athletic career employment" (Aquilina, 2013, p. 375). Interestingly from an Irish football perspective, the European Commission's 2004 report found that "little attention is given by [football] personnel within Irish clubs to encourage young players to advance their formal education" (Amara et al., 2004, p. 43).

The context also needs to include the secondary school structure in Ireland and unlike other European countries, it is relatively linear in terms of how curriculum and assessment are structured. The senior cycle programme in Irish secondary school is also highly pressurised and largely one-dimensional in terms of being the main access route to third level education. The critical point here is a young talented footballer in Ireland may have to make a pragmatically rational decision to choose either their football development or their academic development. This illustrates that the social setting we are born into plays a significant role in shaping our individual dispositions and our relationship with social institutions such as sport and education (Ball, Maguire & Macrae, 2000). These factors play a significant role in shaping an individual's horizons for action in terms of career choice particularly what is perceived to be possible based on their subjective beliefs and the context in which they live.

2.2 Power Relations in the Field

The second key principle of careership theory proposes that career decisions cannot be made without interaction with individuals who influence the process (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996). This interaction is a "complex system of negotiation, bargaining and

sometimes struggle" (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996, p. 3). To frame this point, careership theory uses another concept developed by Bourdieu called 'field'.

> In analytical terms, a field may be defined as a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 97)

In all fields, including football, the power individuals have to influence career progression varies greatly. In fields, there is generally an unequal distribution of power and young footballers must navigate their way through intricate and complex power relations if they wish to become professional footballers. Careership theory can be used as a prism through which power relations in the field of football can be better understood. To do so, this section will examine two key areas; how the football system (domestically and internationally) structures career opportunities and also how individual agency is influenced by the capital young footballers bring to the field.

2.2.1 The Sports System

There is an unrelenting thirst for sport, which, according to Quinn (2013, p. 29), has in the twenty-first century become a "sort of religion" with millions of children taking part in sports every week (Ericsson, Krampe & Tesch-Romer, 1993; Brackenridge et al., 2010; Barreiros, Côté & Fonseca, 2013). This thirst for sport is fuelled by those who control the economic, social and political aspects of it (Stead & Maguire, 2000) and in contemporary times it is now a global business (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002; Gardiner et al., 2006). This is illustrated in part by the number of people who attend specific sporting events and the subscription fees people pay to multinational telecommunication corporations to watch sporting events in their homes. The demand for and consumption of sport is reproduced and maintained by fans, a term associated with fanatic (Dunning, 2001).

The power or capital an individual possesses in a field such as sport, is determined by how the field is objectively structured in different societies (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In most societies, specific sports experience different levels of cultural penetration (Sparvero, Chalip & Green, 2008) directed by governments, the media and sporting federations (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002). Across the globe countries vow their allegiance to specific sports, through government funding or media coverage. Recognising the status of specific sports in different

societies is important because it helps us to understand how the power of social structures can influence the decisions of children to participate in certain sports and to choose it as a career.

Stakeholders in the football network include players, parents and family, coaches, scouts, football associations and football clubs, among others. Careership theory notes that all stakeholders in a field are striving to achieve their own different objectives (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Kelly (2010) acknowledges that within networks of interdependent relations, no one person or group possesses absolute power; however, a power differential exists when a person is in a position to fulfil the needs of another. This Kelly (2010, p. 79) notes "creates a relationship of dependence" and for children in football or in sport generally, this power differential is pervasive where one party is dependent on the decisions of others to enable career progression.

Parents and family are powerful stakeholders in a child's progression to high level expertise (Bourke, 2003; Ward et al., 2007). Parents play a role in this when they involve children in grassroots sports and enable their continued participation (Frey & Eitzen, 1991; Kirk et al., 1997; Augestad & Bergsgard, 2008). In fact, Ward et al. (2007) found that elite football players identified their parents as the greatest influence on their participation. Interestingly, Wiersma (2000) argues that the media glorifies young athletes who are successful in sports events (such as the Olympic games and World Championships) and this is viewed by parents and millions of children alike. Therefore, parents may believe that early specialisation is critical for their child to become an elite athlete and Coakley (2009, p. 125) links this to the commercialisation of youth sports and the emergence of what it now means to be a "good parent".

Early specialised training which involves concentrating on one sport from a young age and developing skills using deliberate practice (Ericsson, Krampe & Tesch-Romer, 1993; Côté, Lidor & Hackfort, 2009) does however raise some concerns. For example, how much is a child's agency being constrained, mediated and/or enabled by forces beyond their control such as family expectations to follow a particular path (Atkins, 2017). In a report published by the European Commission in 1998 on the *European Model of Sport*, it noted that parents often push their children to become professional athletes resulting in their academic education being neglected. This point is also reflected in the following comment:

> Too often the best interests of the child are not taken into consideration when a decision has to be made as to whether a child opts for intensive sport training or continues studying. Adults – parents, coaches, sponsors – tend to impose their choice on the young athlete. (David, 2005, p. 185)

Early specialisation also raises questions about where children are positioned within the overall sport system and how their athletic identity is shaped or at least fostered by others (Strauss, 1962) and how much it is shaped by their own self-determining agency. One of the early models of athlete development entitled 'Developing Talent in Young People' formulated by Bloom in 1985 (Côté, 1999; Wolstencroft, 2002; Coakley, 2009; Stambulova et al., 2009) warned against early specialisation. A key point identified in Bloom's research was that talent development took place over a long period (Bailey & Morley, 2006) and he divided the development phases into the early years, middle years, and late years. The research found that a child's talents developed under specific conditions including "exploration, play, and expressive fun" (Coakley, 2009, p. 138) and not structured activities organised by adults for children at a young age (Bailey, 2018).

Côté's developmental model of sport participation, bears similarities to Bloom's model in that it also proposes three stages of sports participation; the sampling years (six – twelve years old), the specialisation years (thirteen – fifteen years old) and the investment years (sixteen plus) (Côté, 1999; Soberlak & Côté, 2003; Côté, Baker & Abernethy, 2007; Côté, Lidor & Hackfort, 2009; Stambulova et al., 2009). Used in parallel with careership theory, this model provides a framework through which we can see how children move through stages of talent development within the sports system and arrive at the possibility of pursuing a career in sport. Using careership theory these stages could be identified as routines in the career development process (this will be discussed in more detail in section 2.3.1).

Côté's developmental model of sport participation advocates participation in a number of sports during the sampling years (six to twelve years), to maximise access to a variety of sporting environments and to develop a child's range of physical, psychological and personal skills. When children move into the specialising years (twelve – fifteen), two or three sports may be chosen to begin specialisation and parents can provide support during emotional setbacks such as injuries or fatigue (Côté, 1999). During the investment years (sixteen plus), children select one sport to focus on and parents play a significant role in the decision-making

process to fully commit to it. It is at the specialising and investment stages that talented Irish footballers may be presented with options such as trials or migrating to a professional football club in the UK. Kelly (2014) concurs that parents play an important role in the decision to migrate to a professional football club. He argues that the decision may be influenced by the possible money involved in a move abroad, a lack of interest in the domestic league in Ireland and perhaps dismissing the need for formal education.

An important point to make is that the millions of children who participate in sport are not going to become elite professional athletes and the reality is that this status will only fall on a select few (Ericsson, Krampe & Tesch-Romer, 1993; European Commission, 1998, 2012; David, 1999; Amara et al., 2004; McGillivray, Fearn & McIntosh, 2005; Bailey & Morley, 2006; Aquilina, 2009; Malina, 2009; Aquilina & Henry, 2010; López de Subijana, Barriopedro & Conde, 2015; Bailey, 2018). Therefore, Côté's developmental model of sport participation provides a useful framework because it proposes that children should sample a range of sports up to the age of twelve rather than specialising from an early age. By doing so, it is suggested that this places the power back in the hands of children and their parents. For example, when children and their parents focus all of their attention on one sport such as football from an early age, this increases the pressure to succeed and tips the balance of power in favour of football clubs. Therefore, it is suggested that the three stages outlined in the developmental model of sport participation can be used to allow a child to develop at their pace rather than that what the system believes is appropriate. From a career development perspective, this also provides the space and freedom to construct a broader range of skills; physically, psychologically, socially and culturally.

Careership theory argues that certain individuals located within each field exert more power than others because they "determine the rules of the game" (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997, p. 37). For example, the career decisions of a young talented Irish footballer are influenced by many actors and networks in the fields they inhabit (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997; Hodkinson, 2008; Stead & Maguire, 2000; Roderick, 2003; Poli, 2010). We have already noted the role of parents, but these actors also include coaches, clubs, agents/intermediaries and scouts who are, according to Poli (2010, p. 494), collaborating to "make transfers possible and compete [with each other] to appropriate the financial added value". The 'financial added value' when transferring children relates specifically to training compensation which is ultimately generated from the transfer from one football jurisdiction to another. This is a critical point because it

demonstrates the power of the football system to influence the career decisions of young Irish talented footballers.

It is also important to note, that for the children who do migrate to a professional football club, an illusion is created that they are now the 'chosen ones'. When young players do sign with professional football clubs to join their academy system, they enter a socially constructed reality whose sole purpose is to create first team professional footballers (Richardson, Littlewood & Gilbourne, 2004). This work space is also generally closed off and only accessible to its participants, that is, its staff (coaches, analysts, scouts, doctors, physiotherapists and education and welfare officers) and the young contracted players (Brackenridge et al., 2004; Kelly & Waddington, 2006; Brackenridge et al., 2007; Kelly, 2010, 2014; Relvas et al., 2010; Roderick, 2013; Calvin, 2017; Curran & Kelly, 2018). This type of closed work environment can create a unique bond, however, the danger of early specialisation in professional football may result in children, who were considered talented at an early age, being released by English academies at a very young age (Calvin, 2017). Being released by a professional football club at a young age can cause an involuntary exit that may terminate any further career progression in football and possibly a disengagement from the game altogether (Roderick, 2013).

An alternative to migration for young Irish players during the investment years is the League of Ireland, however this is rarely viewed as a first preference career move. Interestingly, eight senior players from the Irish international squad who participated in the 2016 European Championships in France played League of Ireland football. This demonstrates that playing in the League of Ireland is a viable option to enable the transition to professional football in the UK. However, it is possible that the decision to overlook the League of Ireland as a reasonable option demonstrates the powerful lure of UK clubs in what Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000) refer to as a culturally scripted pathway. With young players making their own pragmatically rational career decisions, they are undoubtedly informed by the network of stakeholders within the field of football, where power is used to enable and constrain players' horizons for action and ultimately their career decisions.

2.2.2 Individual Positioning in the Field

When people come together to participate in sport, they enable the emergence of a collective identity. This provides a "common base of knowledge, values and norms" (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997, p. 33). To understand collective identity, Bourdieu suggests that it is necessary to "determine what the field is, where its limits lie, etc., and to determine what species of capital are active in it" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 98-99). An excellent example of this can be found in research completed by Donnelly and Young (1988). Their study of mountain climbers and rugby players found that participation in these sports involved in the first instance obtaining knowledge and information about the sport and its environment (determining the field). Secondly, it involved seeking out and interacting with fellow participants to identify opinions and expectations (establishing the limits) and finally it involved individual recognition and acceptance within the sports group as an athlete. From a sporting context, this demonstrates the measures an individual takes to understand how the field they are entering is constructed. To prosper in such fields careership theory reminds us of the important role of chance or serendipity (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). However, Hodkinson (2008) also notes that the role of chance is still subject to the individual's position in a field and the opportunities presented by the field. Therefore, it is critical for an individual to understand their position by clearly identifying what species of capital are most relevant if they wish to achieve their career ambitions. The different species of capital include economic, social, symbolic and cultural (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) and the influence of each type of capital varies depending on the how the field is structured.

Using careership theory to examine the school to work transition, Atkins (2017) highlights cultural capital in particular and notes that career decisions are shaped by the cultural capital individuals have at their disposal influencing their dispositions and how they are positioned in the field. It is important to recognise that Bourdieu identified three forms of cultural capital; embodied, objectified and institutionalised (Warde, 2006), all of which play an integral part in defining who we are or how others perceive us to be (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Mills, 2008). Interestingly, professional football provides the platform to showcase all three forms of cultural capital. Therefore, this section will examine these concepts to understand why young children formulate an interest in professional football as a career and how they influence the pragmatic rationality of the career decision-making process (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996). This section will also examine how young footballers use their cultural

capital in order to accumulate the type of career capital necessary for acquiring a contract with a professional football club, including where they position a dual career in their quest for this career capital.

Embodied capital exhibits itself through "cultural codes, manner of speaking and consumption practices" (Mills, 2008, p. 84) which are embodied within an individual's habitus. McSharry (2009) suggests that the hyper-visibility of embodied capital in sport is used as a form of social validation. Research completed by McGillivray, Fern and McIntosh (2005) found that when football represents a major part of a person's identity, it is embodied in a way that influences their dispositions and how they interpret their world. As previously mentioned, our dispositions can be linked to our experiences and the schemata we accumulate over time, particularly in relation to our choice of career. McGillivray, Fern and McIntosh (2005) add further that the embodiment of a football identity is reinforced by society through relatives, peers, and neighbours and as a consequence, sporting prowess can "be a form of 'embodied power'" (Dunning, 2001, p. 192). This embodied power may contribute to the development of a preference for a career in football that maximises bodily or physical capital rather than other skills.

Interestingly, the embodied capital that a young talented footballer possesses may not be recognised or socially validated in the same way in other fields such as the school setting. This is critical in understanding the relationship young talented footballers have with the education system and consequently, a dual career. Unless the culture of the school they attend values their embodied capital then the player may feel a polarisation between what is valued in football and what is valued at school. McSharry (2017) suggests that teachers play a key role in bridging the gap by acting as agents to broaden the types of cultural capital valued in schools. Therefore, it will be interesting to examine the football experiences of the participants in this study (Irish underage international footballers) to see if their embodied capital influences their career decisions-making process and their relationship with their school work.

Objectified capital includes the objects or possessions in one's life that have social currency associated with them, for example cars, clothes and houses. This form of capital is particularly important if we consider the lives of professional footballers, who in some cases accrue an array of possessions symbolising their wealth or success (Parker, 2001). This type of capital represents the life young footballers may be aspiring to achieve (Bourke, 2003) and Denham

(2009) noted that famous athletes influence both the attitudes and behaviours of those who admire them. This point is also reflected in a study completed by Parker (2001) who found that a 'consumer culture' clearly existed in the training environment of a football academy. Parker's (2001) research found that appearance (i.e. the type of clothing and branding on training gear) was synonymous with acceptance among peers in the development of a masculine identity. We can also use objectified capital to understand the reason young footballers look to professional football clubs in the UK as a future career rather than the League of Ireland. This may be due to the lack of full-time football in Ireland and the lack of appropriate supports such as facilities when compared to professional football clubs abroad (McGovern, 2000; Bourke, 2002; Elliott, 2016; Curran & Kelly, 2018).

Institutionalised capital is capital that is valued by institutions such as schools, universities and sporting bodies. The ability to play football at an elite level is an excellent example of capital that is physical in nature and is valued by sporting institutions such as football clubs or Football Associations. This generates a cultural expectation from society (Bailey & Morley, 2006) and a contest, whereby institutions compete with each other to acquire these highly sought-after skills. This type of capital is what Newport (2016) refers to as career capital describing it as an accumulation of skills that are rare and valuable and can only be accumulated by using deliberate practice, a concept developed by Ericsson, Krampe, and Tesch-Römer (1993). This involves dedicating ten thousand hours to purposeful practice to develop these rare and valuable skills. Purposeful practice advocates that the practice needs to be specific, monitored and measured with errors being identified and eliminated (Horn & Masunaga, 2006). Deliberate practice is focused on constructing institutionalised capital by fostering the skills that are valued within sporting institutions and it is regulated by adults using rules, legislation and codes of conduct (Ericsson, Krampe & Tesch-Romer, 1993; Côté, Murphy-Mills & Abernethy, 2012).

Schools and universities also bestow institutionalised capital upon those who attend them and obtain specific levels of knowledge (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). The type of knowledge advocated is that most closely associated with formal learning and qualifications are conferred upon those who excel in the accruement of such knowledge. Qualifications, particularly tertiary qualifications, have come to be viewed as necessary 'career capital' (Newport, 2016) for entering employment. According to research undertaken by the National Economic and Social Council there has been a consistent and successful emphasis in Ireland on the importance of

third level education for securing individual employment and for the betterment of the national economy (Sweeney, 2013). This research also found that in 2011, the proportion of 25-34 year olds in Ireland with third level education was the EU's highest (matched only by the UK and Luxembourg). The importance of tertiary education as a necessary form of institutionalised capital is the focus of career guidance across the second level sector. As such "the secondary education system focuses at an early age on preparing young people for entry to third level", however it "is less successful in preparing people for alternative routes" (Sweeney, 2013, pp. 12-13)

Pursuing institutionalised capital within the structures of football and school poses particular challenges for young talented Irish footballers. Rather that pursuing sporting and education goals seamlessly and in tandem, footballers may feel torn by the polarised requirements of these sectors. There is an absence of formal academies in Ireland that would support football development at an elite level and the structure of the secondary school system (Bourke, 2003). At present attempting to balance football development and secondary school during the specialising (twelve – fifteen) and investment (sixteen plus) years can cause unnecessary stress on children if these two institutions are distinctly separated with no integration (Brettschneider, 1999; López de Subijana, Barriopedro & Conde, 2015; Stambulova et al., 2015). As a consequence, the social world of a young talented footballer in Ireland involves a balancing act between high-level sport and high stakes schoolwork.

It is important to note that many European countries offer the necessary structures to facilitate elite sport development as well as the attainment of academic qualifications. Jonker, Elferink-Gemser and Visscher (2009) uses the Netherlands as an example to highlight how balancing education and high-level sport can be facilitated. For example, it has twenty-three schools that support its student-athletes offering flexibility in relation to the school timetable, homework, exams and the provision of a mentor. Supporting athletes to manage their sport and academic development, that is, a dual career, can also be seen in other European countries such as Sweden, Denmark and Finland (Metsä-Tokila, 2002; Christensen & Sørensen, 2009). Moreover, Norway focuses specifically on teenagers to provide a flexible school curriculum tailoring the needs of their athletes by collaborating with schools (Augestad & Bergsgard, 2008). This ensures that young talented footballers can manage their lives by maintaining a routine across their life course.

2.3 Transformations across the life course

The third and final part of careership theory relates to how the career decision-making process is affected by the passage of time (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996; Hodkinson, 1998, 2008). Rather than viewing career decisions as isolated points in a person's life, careership theory argues that they should be considered as important stages interlinked across the whole life course (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Careership theory rejects the belief that careers are linear because it is simply not possible for careers to follow a trajectory that can be mapped from beginning to end. In fact, the career journey is so complex there may be no clearly identifiable patterns in a person's career pathway. Instead careership theory concentrates on two specific concepts called 'turning points' and 'routines'. These concepts are used to highlight periods in an individual's life when they go through career transformations (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). By using the term 'transformation' Strauss (1962) suggests that it also invites us to consider how the identity of individuals change.

Physical, social and psychological transformations occur across an individual's life course (Elder, 1995) influencing how they interact in different fields. When we enter these fields, generally there is an attempt to transform who we are. This can happen independently by ourselves, by others or both, to develop the skills needed to fulfil certain functions within that field. For example, developing certain skills may have end goals in sight such as completing a state exam, winning a football match or making a profit but all are underpinned by a transformation of our former self and are generally positive in nature. Careership theory draws on the early work of Strauss (1962, p. 66) who explains that "a child going through different 'stages of knowledge' is not merely acquiring more and more knowledge but may be viewed as becoming transformed". This is particularly important when we consider young talented Irish footballers because they encounter many stages of knowledge or transitions to build the required career capital to become professional footballers. Therefore, this section will use the concepts routines and turning points to explore the career journey of young talented Irish footballers. Although not provided for in careership theory this section will also use Schlossberg's (1981) 'model for analyzing human adaptation to transition' and Scanlon and Doyle's (2018) 'model for supported transition' to examine what supports, if any, might be provided to this cohort during their many transformations.

2.3.1 Turning Points and Routines

According to Strauss (1962, p. 71) turning points occur "when an individual has to take stock, to re-evaluate, revise, resee, and rejudge" and this can provide perspective in relation to a stable period in an individual's life course. For example, a turning point may enlighten an individual by providing perspective on a specific part of their life such as a relationship with a person or the career path they are on. Careership theory argues that turning points "may be of short duration or extend over a period of time, and....may be recognised at the time or only with hindsight" (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996, p. 142). Although Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson (1996) acknowledge that classifying turning points (or any concept for that matter) can be risky if applied too rigidly, they suggest three turning points that arise in relation to the career decision-making process. They include structural, forced and self-initiated turning points (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997; Hodkinson, 2008; Barker-Ruchti et al., 2014; Lundahl et al., 2017; Andersson & Barker-Ruchti, 2018).

The first turning point is 'structural' and these are "largely determined by structural patterns of life course that are built in to the society where the person lives" (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996, p. 142). Significantly, this type of turning point can be prepared for because they occur at stages in the life course that are predictable (ibid). For example, structural turning points in different countries vary our entitlements based on our age (Lalor, De Róiste & Devlin, 2007) such as: when to retire, the ending of compulsory education, being allowed to vote or drive and from an Irish football perspective being allowed to go on trials or migrate to a professional football club. There are also interesting similarities between structural turning points in careership theory and a life-span developmental psychology approach. This approach refers to events based on chronological age as normative age graded influences linking it to "society's age-graded socialisation practices" (Sugarman, 2001, p. 135).

Structural turning points are particularly useful when applied to Côté's developmental model of sport participation as we try to understand the career decision-making process of young talented Irish footballers. This is because a structural turning point occurs during the specialisation years (thirteen – fifteen) and another occurs during the investment years (sixteen plus), both of which are directly related to the age of the child. During the specialisation years, the first structural turning point relates to section 3 (g) of the FAI Scouting Regulations (2011) which states that permission to go on a football trial will only be granted to a player who has

reached fourteen years of age. To receive an offer to go on trial with a professional football club abroad, a young Irish player has to impress a football scout who decides if the player is worthy of a trial. This structural turning point is important because for the first time, it allows children to access the professional football world by permitting them to go on trials. The second structural turning point occurs in the investment years and is critical because it provides the freedom to move within the EU/EEA to other football leagues who can offer full-time football. This structural turning point is significant because the FIFA RSTP only permits a transfer within the EU/EEA if a player has turned sixteen years of age. Turning sixteen does not guarantee an offer to join a professional football club, but when the opportunity is presented, the decision to migrate has to be accepted and put into practice by the individual.

This moves us on to the second turning point in careership theory which are 'self-initiated' examples of which include getting married, continuing with school after compulsory education, buying a home or changing career. These occur in response to a range of factors such as a change of position in a field or possibly a change in personal circumstances. Therefore, it could be argued that a self-initiated turning point is never truly independent due to the fact that the decision is never context free (Hodkinson, 1998). In fact, Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997, p. 39) note that a self-initiated turning point precipitates "a transformation, in response to a range of factors in his/her personal life in the field". In Irish football this is demonstrated in a number of ways such as moving schoolboy club or deciding to migrate. As previously mentioned, the decision to migrate takes place during the investment years (sixteen plus) and this is the age a player decides to invest all of their time and energy to pursue one sport. If this move abroad takes place, the investment is not simply a geographic move; it also involves a social, cultural and emotional investment from the young player (Ball, Maguire & Macrae, 2000). Intriguingly, a key factor to support the social, cultural and emotional investment made by a child is their family (Côté, 1999) which is partially removed if they migrate.

The third and final turning point identified by careership theory are 'forced'; imposed due to external events or the actions of others. This forces individuals to reconsider their future in response to events such as redundancy or bereavement (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996). A key issue that occurs in football is that many young players who are labelled as future stars fail to achieve what was expected of them when they move to the professional football environment (Relvas et al., 2010) and are then released by their clubs. As young players become engulfed in the cocooned environment of professional football, their release into the

'real' world can cause significant readjustment issues concerning their future career (Woods, Buckley & Kirrane, 2005; Brown & Potrac, 2009; Blakelock, 2014; Calvin, 2017). Being released by a professional football club can be identified as a forced turning point as it is determined by external factors beyond the control of the young footballer. This can include deselection due to the decision of an academy manager or an injury that may prohibit the player's progression or in fact may be career ending (Sparkes & Smith, 2002).

While other theories on human development and career development focus specifically on turning points, careership theory views them as inseparable from the 'routines' that precede and proceed them (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997; Hancock, 2009; Barker-Ruchti et al., 2014). Moreover, careership theory identifies routines as periods when nothing dramatic happens (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996; Hancock, 2009). For example, our daily routines can be planned and mapped out days, weeks, even months in advance and this is particularly evident in relation to our careers. During these routines, turning points are integral because they either reshape or reaffirm routines causing a positive or negative transition. Careership theory suggests that periods of routine are central to "career transformation" (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997, p. 40) because during these periods we have new experiences causing our schemata to modify, further developing our habitus. Originally, Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson (1996) developed three routines namely; confirmatory, contradictory and socialising and later developed two additional routines called dislocating and evolutionary (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). These five routines will be explained further in the following sections.

The confirmatory routine is an acknowledgement that previous decisions concerning a person's career were the correct ones and critically, the individual's identity has developed in line with what they had intended (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996). For example, the decisions young talented Irish footballers make such as moving schoolboy club, are confirmed and reinforced if they bring success, admiration and social validation from those within their social network. In contrast to confirmatory routines, contradictory routines are seen as incompatible with previous decisions which are now seen as wrong (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996). According to careership theory this has a negative effect on an individual's identity due to a mismatch between the original objective perception of a career compared to the subjective reality.

For young footballers, this objective perception is created through a realisation that they need to move to a football environment that offers the challenges and opportunities to progress their football development (Andersson & Barker-Ruchti, 2018). This can happen during the specialising years and the investment years, for example, during the investment years contradictory routines may emerge in two ways. Firstly, when a player migrates to a professional football club this new reality may not meet their expectations or achieve their goals and they may also find it difficult to adjust to the new environment without family and friends (Weedon, 2012; Bourke, 2003). Secondly, if a player fails to get a contract with a professional football club in the UK, this is what Schlossberg (1981) refers to as a non-event (discussed in more detail in section 2.3.2). Therefore, this may cause a young player to question the decisions they made as the move abroad they had worked so hard for has not materialised.

The third routine identified in careership theory is socialising. Although Andersson and Barker-Ruchti (2018, p. 3) explain the socialising routine "as a temporary stop in order to pursue the original intended career path", there are other nuances to be considered. Careership theory argues that the socialising routine occurs when an individual is socialised to take on a career they had not originally considered resulting in a transformation of their identity. Therefore, a socialising routine does not have to emanate from a temporary stop in a career, it can arise at any time; before, during or after an original intended career path. For young children who aspire to become professional footballers, there may be a period along their career journey where they believed a career as a professional football in the UK is a possibility. However, this may not materialise in the way they had planned, for example they may not be offered a contract with a professional football club or at least not at the level they had anticipated. Socialising routines provide for the possibility of choosing to engage in a lower standard of football or perhaps choosing an alternative route altogether such as focusing on further schooling or education.

Dislocating routines occur when an individual is living with an identity they do not like or want and therefore the individual will never be fully socialised to accept it (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). This routine is very difficult for the individual because they long for an identity or a career that is no longer accessible and this is heightened by the fact that they have limited power to initiate a transformation (ibid). An excellent example of this is when a football player receives an injury that ends their career, or they are released by a professional football club. Finally, the evolutionary routine is a gradual change whereby an individual outgrows their

original career identity. Careership theory suggests that this may or may not include a turning point (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997).

To summarise this section, it is worth revisiting the fact that both turning points and routines play a key role in career development. How they apply to each person varies depending on their subjective perception shaped by the objective social networks. It is also important to note that an event can lead to two or even all three turning points occurring. For example, the final decision to migrate to a professional football club is structural along with a mixture of forced and self-initiated turning points. In many instances across the life course one may be faced with limited choices or pressure to choose one career path over another. Although career migration for young Irish footballers is not technically a forced turning point, there may be social and cultural pressure to accept the opportunity to migrate. Bourke (2003) notes that young Irish footballers are encouraged to migrate to professional football clubs because it might be the only opportunity they get.

It might be assumed that self-initiated turning points will impact positively on individuals, while forced turning points will impact negatively. However, the impact any turning point has on an individual varies significantly in terms of 'scale' (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996; Barker-Ruchti et al., 2014). For example, Coakley (1983) argues that retirement from sport, even when forced, could be seen as a social re-birth providing new life opportunities. Research on elite gymnasts who had retired noted that they felt a sense of freedom from the rigours of training and competition, which had brought considerable stress including dietary restrictions in order to remain thin (Dacyshyn, 2001). Similarly, Kerr and Dacyshyn (2000, pp. 130-131) in their research on elite gymnasts concluded that "[a]thletes should be discouraged from making sport the only avenue from which they derive a sense of personal worth and identity... and live a more 'normal' balanced life". The impact a turning point such as deselection or retirement has on a footballer may be determined by the strength of their athletic identity. If a person has a strong sense of athletic identity, Sparkes and Smith (2002) suggest that there is a greater risk of emotional disturbance or extreme disruption to their sense of self.

2.3.2 Supported Transition

If we simply consider the word transit, it "suggests movement across time and space" (Hart, 2014a, p. 185) and this follows that as individuals move through their life course they are in a constant state of transition. Colley (2007) suggests that having consensus on how to define

transition is an impossible task but it does encompass a number of key elements. Transition is a process of change over time, this change can include both the context and the individual and it can take place over a short or long timespan. To build on this, Hutchison (2010, p. 14) describes transition as "changes in roles and statuses that represent a distinct departure from prior roles and statuses". Interestingly, transition is explained by Anderson, Goodman and Schlossberg in a way that incorporates a number of key concepts from careership theory that have been discussed throughout this chapter:

> In broad terms, a transition is any event or nonevent that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles. Transitions have been placed conceptually within a developmental framework, described as turning points or as a period between two periods of stability. (Anderson, Goodman & Schlossberg 2011, p. 39)

Children involved in sport, face many transitions and although the list is exhaustive, some include joining their first club, mastering skills or competing in their first event. From an Irish football context, when young players are recognised by individuals in the football network as 'talented', four key transitions need particular attention and have to be managed. These transitions include (1) going on trial to professional football clubs, (2) signing a contract with a professional football club which results in migration, (3) refusing the opportunity to migrate and (4) not being offered a contract with a professional football club. Interestingly, all of these transitions are triggered by structural turning points and this period of a young talented footballer's career development (fourteen to sixteen years of age) confirms that certain transitions are closely linked to chronological age (Schlossberg, 1981).

Central to the development of careership theory is how young people make career decisions particularly in relation to their transition from school to work. Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson (1996) acknowledge the significance of this transition in the life course, focusing on when and how it occurs. An important reason Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson (1996) developed careership theory was to give a voice to the participants in their research. Therefore, their theory is particularly attentive to the lived experiences of individuals as they unwrap the complexity of the career decision-making process. In addition to this, having the ability to listen to children's views during transitions can also be used to protect them from harm (David, 2005). Providing children with a voice is enshrined in the UNCRC (1989) which was adopted

in Ireland in 1992 (Lalor, De Róiste & Devlin, 2007). Therefore, it is important that those responsible for running organised sport such as football put mechanisms in place to ensure children are empowered to voice any concerns they may have (Donnelly & Petherick, 2004; Pitchford et al., 2004; Brackenridge et al., 2010). This is because children generally trust and accept what adults tell them and even if they think something is wrong, they may not feel strong enough to speak up for themselves (Brackenridge & Rhind, 2010).

With sport becoming so specialised for younger children, there is a growing need to understand the risks associated with elite sporting environments. Failing to listen to children or not providing them with an opportunity to voice their concerns can have detrimental consequences. For example, Brackenridge (2008) argues that the risk of abuse in sport becomes even more prevalent prior to an athlete gaining 'elite status'. This she argues is due to the belief that having invested so much time in the sport that the fear of being dropped from the squad or exclusion may prevent athletes from disclosing abuse. This point is reinforced by Boocock (2002, p. 99) who states that "[t]he reality is that child abuse does happen in sport, as in any other element of society". In football, to understand children's experiences, Pitchford et al. (2004) suggests that this can be achieved by understanding their relationships with stakeholders, for example, scouts, coaches and football clubs.

In order to further highlight 'individual voice', this section will build on careership theory using Schlossberg's (1981) 'model for analyzing human adaptation to transition' and Scanlon and Doyle's (2018) 'new model for supported transition'. The model presented by Schlossberg (1981, p. 3) attempts to "elaborate a theory which describes the extraordinary complex reality that accompanies and defines the capacity of human beings to cope with change in their lives". Schlossberg (1981) suggests that when individuals progress through life they are constantly experiencing change and transition, and these can be identified as life changes or subtle changes. In the same way that routines and turning points differ depending on the individual, it is critical to recognise that individuals also vary in their ability to adapt to changes in their lives (Schlossberg, 1981). Therefore, different supports are required as individuals transition through their individual life course and Scanlon and Doyle's (2018) 'new model for supported transition' is particularly useful in this context:

> ...the model places the young person at the centre of the process by assisting them to explore their aspirations and brings them to a point in their lives where they are able to

> make an "*informed choice"* about their future (Scanlon & Doyle, 2018, p. 55, emphasis in original)

To assist young footballers make informed career choices, it is critical to understand their aspirations and establish if this includes a dual career. Regrettably, there is a dearth of knowledge focusing on the lived experiences of managing a dual career amongst young Irish footballers. Understanding the phases of football career transition is helpful for the implementation of supports for coping with such transitions. The first phase of football career transition is linked to the specialising years and we can refer to this as the preparation phase (twelve – fifteen). It is in this phase that all young talented Irish footballers face similar challenges due to the requirement to remain in compulsory education whilst maintaining involvement with a range of teams and going on trials to professional football clubs in the UK. Therefore, during this phase young footballers should be provided with the support they need to manage a dual career and to prepare for the possible routines, turning points and transitions they may face in their future career journey.

During the preparation phase, anecdotal evidence suggests that there can be an intense focus on getting a move abroad to join a professional football club particularly for those who have reached an elite level by representing Ireland at underage level. The reason for this is because they may feel they are being left behind from a football development perspective when compared to their peers in England who have entered the professional football environment at a much younger age, possibly as young as eight years old. Interestingly however, although the challenge of balancing football and academic work is significant, Bourke's (2003) research suggests that young talented Irish footballers like secondary school and their interest in school work only deteriorated when they were scouted by a professional football club from abroad.

As previously discussed, when young players turn sixteen, they transition into the investment years (Côté, 1999; Soberlak & Côté, 2003; Côté, Baker & Abernethy, 2007; Côté, Lidor & Hackfort, 2009; Stambulova et al., 2009). During these years, the career of a young talented Irish player can move into either the migration phase to a professional football club or the domestic phase which involves staying at home in Ireland. Although the migration phase is self-explanatory, the domestic phase can occur in two ways. First of all, a young footballer may reject a contract offer from a professional football club and secondly, they may fail to receive any contract offer and this is what Schlossberg (1981) refers to as a non-event. Non-events can

be subtle changes, or they may be more obvious. Schlossberg's (1981) model also incorporates anticipated and unanticipated transitions (Anderson, Goodman & Schlossberg, 2011).

Anticipated transitions include events that are planned, and this can allow for adjustment whereas unanticipated transitions are unpredictable and therefore can be sudden lacking the ability to prepare for them. The three phases of football career transition (preparation, migration and domestic) highlight the complexity of career progression in football and illustrates the need to have appropriate support structures to assist young footballers with their career decisions. The diverse and diverging pathways of football career progression during the investment years highlights what careership theory notes as the unpredictability and non-linearity of the career process (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996). Critically, even if the migration phase is chosen, it still does not guarantee a player will become a professional footballer and support is needed to manage their deselection from a professional football club if this occurs.

As mentioned in section 2.1.2, a report completed by the European Commission in 2004 found that Irish football clubs paid little attention to their players' formal education (Amara et al., 2004). This report also acknowledged that there was an absence of an Education and Welfare Officer (EWO) in Irish football clubs. To put this into context, the English game began appointing EWO's into their English academies in 1998 providing "career planning for those unable to make the grade at professional level" (Pitchford, 2007c, p. 117). It could be argued that the need for EWO's is not necessary in Irish football because Ireland has a limited professional game. However, it is suggested that due to the structural deficiencies in Irish football, having an EWO at some level of the game (club, county, FAI ETP or underage international football) could assist talented footballers particularly Irish underage international footballers to broaden their horizons for action concerning alternative career choices. Interestingly, the support young talented Irish footballers need to manage their transitions are similar to research completed by Scanlon and Doyle (2018).

In their project 'Progressing Accessible Supported Transitions to Employment' (PASTE), Scanlon and Doyle (2018) investigated the concept of supported transition for school leavers with intellectual disabilities. This project identified the need to provide this cohort of students with a platform to voice their dreams and aspirations by ensuring they had a person-centred transition plan. To do so, Scanlon and Doyle (2018) proposed the 'new model for supported transition' which included the provision of a parent information programme and a 'Career and

Employment Facilitator' (CEF). Scanlon and Doyle (2018) are careful to distinguish the role of the CEF from the role of Career Guidance Counsellors in mainstream schools and Occupational Guidance Counsellors in special schools. CEF's support school to work transitions by: (1) developing a close relationship based on trust (2) identifying educational and vocational goals as well as training needs and (3) mentoring the young person to explore aspirations, raise expectations, develop pathways and ensure that their transition plan is sustainable (Scanlon & Doyle, 2018). It is arguable that this type of support should be provided to young Irish footballer by EWO's when immersed in the football environment and could be applied to all three phases of football career transition.

In order to understand the transitions (events or non-events) within these phases of football career transition, Schlossberg's (1981) model proposes the examination of three separate components: (1) the individual's perception of a transition, (2) the characteristics of the pre and post transition environment and (3) the characteristics of the individual. Therefore, this ensures a transition is interpreted from the individual's subjective standpoint whilst also examining their internal support network which includes their family and network of friends as well as institutional support. Institutional support becomes particularly important during the migration phase and a clear link with the EWO in the professional football club, as well as support from the FAI welfare officers who are funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs (Murphy, 2015) to support Irish football players in the UK, would be critical.

Support is also required for young Irish talented players who make the transition back to Ireland having been released/deselected by professional football clubs. Brown and Potrac (2009) investigated the experiences of former elite footballers whose professional careers were prematurely ended as a consequence of deselection. A key finding from their research identified emotional difficulties for the participants due to their "one-dimensional identity [which was] based around their footballing performances" (Brown & Potrac, 2009, p. 155). As their life had revolved around football from a very young age, it was a struggle to recreate a new self when this life had come to an abrupt end. Brown and Potrac (2009, p. 155) also highlighted the lack of support from the club they had "dedicated their lives to for so many years". This is exacerbated further when deselection occurs at a young age as players may not have the cognitive ability or skill set required to establish a new identity or to devise a plan for the future. Deselection is particularly problematic when career options are limited by disengagement with education within the professional football environment.

2.4 Summary

The application of careership theory is particularly useful because principally, it provides a framework to help understand how the elite football environment (largely driven by the global transfer market) influences the career decision-making process of young talented Irish footballers. Critically, however, careership theory does this by interrogating the complexities encountered by young talented footballers in Ireland as they navigate their career path. Applying this theory has the potential to provide children and their parents with clarity concerning the complexity of how the football system is structured, how it functions and more importantly who controls it. This is significant from a theoretical perspective because careership theory provides a conceptual framework that examines the important relationship between structure (the objective) and agency (the subjective) highlighting that career choices are always bounded and pragmatically rational (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997; Hodkinson, 1998, 2008).

Careership theory describes disposition as not only cognitive and discursive, but also embodied. This is significant because individuals use their personal disposition to interact within the field(s) they inhabit, and it is through these interactions that habitus is (re)shaped (Hodkinson, 2008). The power of the embodied disposition to become a footballer and the structural forces at play that influence this disposition highlight how young footballers' horizons for action are formed. Careership theory recognises that an individual's career path is never linear and the concepts of routines and turning points illustrate this point. The use of Bourdieu's concepts, field, habitus and capital are also useful and the application of the developmental model of sport participation provided a deeper understanding of the relationship young footballers have with the football system in the progression of their career.

How individuals adapt and cope with change particularly during transitions (Schlossberg, 1981) is critical to our understanding of career decision-making, an example of which includes moving from school to work (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997; Ball, Maguire & Macrae, 2000; Atkins, 2017). Using Schlossberg's (1981) model for analysing human adaptation to transition is useful because it provides a broad understanding of transition. It is also based on three key principles which it is argued could be used by an EWO to support young talented Irish footballers during any of the three individual phases of football career transition. Building on careership theory, the final section examined how the

‘new model for supported transition’ could assist both child and parent to manage the complex career pathway to professional football.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

3.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the methodological approach adopted for this research and explore how using questionnaires, focus groups and individual interviews were pertinent to the research design. The chapter will explore the justification for a mixed methods approach; illustrate how the methods of data collection are interlinked and how a rich narrative was used to enable the participants to explore their experiences and tell their story. The structure of this chapter will consist of five main sections. The first section will explore the philosophical paradigm and the rationale that underpins this research; the second will discuss the criteria for participation and the recruitment of participants; section three will provide an overview of the materials used and section four will outline the data collection process while section five will critique the approach adopted to analyse the data.

3.1 Philosophical Approach

A key consideration when deciding on a methodology to inform any research design is our understanding of knowledge and how it is acquired (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009; Gratton & Jones, 2010; Bryman, 2012). However, before a research design is even considered to collect new knowledge, Creswell (2007) suggests that a key factor is the philosophical stance taken by the researcher. This philosophical stance is what is commonly referred to as the research paradigm and this impacts on data collection choices and subsequent method of analysis.

> It represents a *worldview* that defines, for its holder, the nature of the "world," the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts… (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 107, emphasis in original)

This worldview forms the basis of each individual researcher's belief system guiding the practical application of one's research (Mertens, 2003; Hammond, 2005; Creswell, 2009) or what Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 22) refer to as the "net that contains the researcher's epistemological, ontological, and methodological premises". The researcher in this study has always been intrigued with how society functions particularly its role in shaping the lives of individuals based on where in the world they are born and the historical period in which they

live. Plummer (2010) argues that the country we are born into shapes who we are such as: the language we initially speak, who our family may be and the religion or education we receive. These factors ascribe varying weights of constraint and autonomy regarding each individual's life journeys. If we consider those who have access to housing, education and a variety of career options, their life options can be less inhibited than others.

Establishing one worldview in academic research has become unnecessarily complex with pressure to select one paradigm over another. This has only resulted in a paradigm war, all vying for their own validity (Miller, 2003; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003; Hammond, 2005; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009; Kelly, 2010; Bryman, 2012). This researcher agrees in principle with Patton (1990) who advocates choice when considering the use of alternative paradigms as this increases the options available to researchers. This is because like life, research is complex and comprises of contextual issues such as time, access and available resources. Consequently, it was important to the researcher to ensure all research methods were considered to guarantee that the research questions were answered (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005; Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009; Gratton & Jones, 2010; Bryman, 2012; Youngs & Piggot-Irvine, 2012).

Although defining the terms qualitative and quantitative may seem superfluous, it was important to crystallise the difference between the two methods of data collection due to their roles in separating academic researchers particularly in relation to their philosophical stance.

> The term *quantitative* implies something that can be quantified or measured, and…*qualitative* implies making an assessment or judgement that involves interpretation. (Bazeley, 2003, pp. 387-388, emphasis in original)

A researcher's philosophical stance influences the way in which the world is viewed. Thus, assumptions are made about the research strategy, the scrutiny of knowledge and how this will be developed (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). This is relevant when we consider three key concepts in choosing a methodology; ontology, epistemology and axiology. The philosophical position a researcher adopts will inevitably shape the direction of research influenced by the interpretation of reality (ontology), what constitutes acceptable knowledge (epistemology) and the role of values in research (axiology) (Creswell, 2007).

It is accepted that there are many different research philosophies (Bryman, 2012). However, three in particular, positivism, interpretivism and pragmatism will be critiqued to highlight the differences in how researchers think about their methodology and more importantly how their research is validated (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). A brief overview of these three paradigms will be presented, why they are relevant for this study and how they will be applied. This debate is important within the context of this study because although pragmatism was primarily the preferred philosophical approach in this research, it incorporates elements of positivism and interpretivism.

Positivism

Positivism views knowledge as true or valid when studying human behaviour if it is gathered using experimental scientific methods in the natural sciences, for example, physics, chemistry, economics and psychology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The collection and analysis of data used by positivists includes quantitative measurement and concerns the relationship between theory and research (Patton, 1990; Mertens, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Bryman, 2012). Using a positivist approach at the start of this research provided the opportunity to develop a questionnaire that suited the needs of this study. Applying the principle of deductivism, a hypothesis is generated which is used to test explanations of laws the researcher is assessing (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009; Bryman, 2012). The application of quantitative methods as a form of research are seen as objective because "in principle, are not dependent on human skill, perception, or even presence" (Patton, 1990, p. 54). Therefore, qualitative research is seen as an assault on this tradition because it is believed to include opinion and personal bias with no way of verifying their truth (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

From an ontological viewpoint, social reality is viewed by a positivist researcher as objective, external and independent of social actors (Bryman, 2012; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). It is suggested that because the positivist uses objective measurement, it is not subject to the feelings, emotions, beliefs, interpretations or values of the researcher (Gratton & Jones, 2010). However, a criticism concerning the purity of quantitative methods relates to the fact that the testing instruments used to gather objective data is not totally free of subjective intrusion (Patton, 1990). In fact, Plummer (2005) suggests that identifying a wider concern or value in society is central to all academic research. This follows that the researcher is involved in either the development or the selection of testing methods such as questionnaires that include an

unconscious bias to view statistics that suit the researcher's hypothesis. In addition to this it is suggested that the positivist paradigm is limited because it cannot satisfactorily address the voice of the participant in research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Therefore, due to the limitations of the positivist approach from a philosophical stance, this research requires the inclusion of interpretivism to facilitate the voice of the participants.

Interpretivism

In contrast to positivism, which argues that the social world is external to the individual, an interpretivist approach focuses on the individual to help understand how their social reality is constructed and then reconstructed (Sparkes, 1992). Therefore, because the voice of the participant was central to the research design, applying an interpretivist approach could address a key element of the research that positivism could not fully achieve. The rejection of a positivist approach from a sporting context for example is the argument that sport is unpredictable and, although it is subject to external social forces, individuals have free will to respond to these forces (Gratton & Jones, 2010). This is reflected in comments made by Norbert Elias who, it is argued, is one of the founding fathers of the sociology of sport;

> …it is possible to advance knowledge and to make discoveries in the field of sociology with methods which can be very different from those of the natural sciences. The discovery, not the method, legitimises research as scientific. (Elias, 1986, p. 20)

In contrast to positivism, the ontology of interpretivism views reality as socially constructed and the epistemological position is subjective (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). In fact, it has been suggested that all research is interpretive because how the world is interpreted is based on the researcher's beliefs and feelings about how it should be studied and understood (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Using a purely interpretivist philosophical approach requires an empathetic viewpoint as the researcher enters the social world of the research participants. The interpretivist researcher does so in an attempt to collect data to understand how the participants view the world they inhabit (Gratton & Jones, 2010; Bryman, 2012). Interpretivism gathers qualitative information relying on methods such as interviewing which is informed and bound by the context (Fontana & Frey, 2005). However, a criticism of an interpretive approach concerns the reliability and validity of the research collected due to the subjective nature of how people's thoughts and feelings are interpreted (Gratton & Jones, 2010).

Pragmatism

Having considered the strengths and weaknesses of both the positivist and interpretivist paradigms, pragmatism was chosen because as a philosophical approach, it consolidated the research being undertaken and could successfully incorporate positivism and interpretivism. With the growing popularity of mixed methods as a research approach (Kemper, Stringfield & Teddlie, 2003; Youngs & Piggot-Irvine, 2012), Bryman (2012) asks if the 'paradigm war' between qualitative and quantitative research is over? Although it may not be entirely over (or ever will be), there is a suggestion that more researchers are turning to pragmatism as a paradigm on which to base their worldview (Patton, 1990; Maxcy, 2003; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003; Hammond, 2005; Bryman, 2012). This is because pragmatism liberates a researcher to explore what is true and valid without the constraints of having to identify prior knowledges, laws or rules or a single foundational discourse of research methodology (Maxcy, 2003).

However, it is not being suggested that the pragmatist philosophical stance is the solution to bring all factions from the qualitative and quantitative communities together, as there remains significant polarisation between the two (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). In fact, paradigm purists argue that combining quantitative and qualitative methods is simply incompatible (Rallis & Rossman, 2003; Youngs & Piggot-Irvine, 2012). Moreover, these purists posited the incompatibility thesis which suggests that combining two research methods can cause difficulty due to the differences in how they are applied (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). However, pragmatists such as Charles Sanders Peirce, John Dewey and George Herbert Mead challenged the notion that the real world could only be investigated using one scientific method (Datta, 1997; Maxcy, 2003).

> Combining different methods is valuable (or pragmatic) because each approach provides a different perspective on the topic. The specific research questions addressed, the data collected and the ways in which evidence is understood and interpreted complement one another. In addition, each approach has its own limitations or 'imperfections', which can be compensated for by using an alternative method. (Hammond, 2005, p. 241)

Dewey's theory of scientific inquiry is interesting particularly his stance on how the world is understood. Maxcy (2003) explains that Dewey rejected the concept that objectivity superseded

subjectivity, in other words, that simply recording independent facts and figures was enough. However, Dewey also rejected the view of the subjectivist or radical relativists who relied on findings of social enquiry that were relative to the individual or groups psyche (ibid). Therefore, pragmatism is seen as a philosophy of practice with a focus on the research problem and the questions to be answered.

Consequently, instead of being limited to one research paradigm, pragmatism provided the freedom to address the research questions without having to commit to one system of philosophy or reality. Moreover, it provides flexibility to gather and analyse data to suit the social, historical or political context. As a result, pragmatism encourages the use of all research approaches available instead of focusing on one method of research over another (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005; Creswell, 2007, 2009). Patton (1990) notes his preference for pragmatism because it provides flexibility to the researcher in their application of a methodological approach. This is what Patton (1990, p. 39, emphasis in original) refers to as "*methodological appropriateness*" rather than "methodological orthodoxy". This was a critical consideration for this study as the method of research had to be appropriate to adapt to the context rather than be limited to one methodological approach.

3.1.1 Type of Study

This research study was longitudinal in design and provided the opportunity to investigate the time order of variables in the career decision-making process of Irish underage international footballers (Gratton & Jones, 2010; Bryman, 2012). This was particularly useful to help understand the causal influences that shaped the participants' attitude to a dual career over an extended period of time. Although a longitudinal study requires a greater investment of time, it also strengthens the reliability and validity of the study being undertaken (Gratton & Jones, 2010) as data is collected over a number of different time points. It is normal to group longitudinal research into two categories: the panel study and the cohort study (Bryman, 2012), with this research utilising the latter. Using a cohort of children or adolescents to capture longitudinal data in relation to social or environmental factors can help chronicle their lives which in turn provides data to analyse and compare the various transitions, life events and turning points that shape their life course.

Choosing to focus on a specific cohort was an important decision in the research design as it would capture the common experiences of a sample who were all at similar periods in their

career development as footballers; and, as this was a prospective study (Gratton & Jones, 2010), it provided the opportunity to collect data from the participants over a period of time. Therefore, it was important the data collection methods selected were capable of interrogating the research topic under review (Smith, 2012). Research completed by McGillivray and McIntosh (2006) suggests that the decisions of footballers when immersed in the professional football environment are at best pragmatic because the dominance of the football club plays a significant role in narrowing their horizons. Therefore, the context was an important consideration for the researcher during data collection. For example, the research had to incorporate the lives of participants who were with professional football clubs in the UK as well as those who had not migrated and were still living in Ireland.

Focusing on the participants' lives in Ireland was particularly important because although there were a number of studies that focused on children in football environments (Bourke, 2002, 2003; Christensen & Sørensen, 2009; Parker 1996, 2000, 2001, 2006; Platts & Smith 2009, 2018; Platts, 2012; Brown & Potrac, 2009), there was a dearth of knowledge concerning the process of trying to transition from school and amateur football in Ireland to full-time professional football abroad from an underage international footballer's perspective. Therefore, the research questions had to encapsulate the structure of the participants' social environment including their family, school, and the role football played in shaping their career decisions. The research questions were as follows:

1. How do social and cultural factors influence the career decision-making process to become a professional footballer and who facilitates this process?
2. How do Irish underage international footballers interact with the football environment to advance their career progression?
3. What is the role of education in the occupational career choice of Irish underage international footballers and how can a dual career path be supported?
4. Are young Irish talented footballers who migrate to a professional football club supported during their school-work transition and what supports are necessary to support successful transitions?

3.1.2 Choosing a research approach

For the purposes of this study, data collection used a mixed method approach using three sequential stages which afforded the researcher the opportunity to triangulate the data to

support its validity and reliability (Creswell, 2009). Moreover, as the research design was longitudinal, it provided the opportunity to collect data over three different stages at different time periods of the participants life course (Ansorge et al., 2001). Using a longitudinal design was particularly important because it not only captured information about Irish underage international footballers at three separate points across their life course, it enriched the data collection in each of the subsequent stages. This provided a richer understanding of the participants' career decision-making at specific periods of their life.

Stage one involved the application of a questionnaire, stage two involved conducting focus groups and stage three involved one-to-one interviews. The data collected in stage one was informed by the literature reviewed and each subsequent stage was informed by the data collected in the previous stage. For example, using focus groups in stage two of the data collection process provided the opportunity to further develop the data collected in stage one. Furthermore, the data generated in stage two was used by the researcher to develop themes further in stage three during the individual interviews. It is important to note that stage two and three of the data collection process also provided the opportunity for new themes to develop. Critically, this longitudinal approach ensured that the career decisions of eleven participants were captured in all three stages. This provided in-depth accounts of how these participants subjectively viewed their careers and the decisions they made to become professional footballers.

The reason for choosing a mixed methods approach was to gather as much information as possible that would allow a thorough investigation of the empirical social world (Plummer, 2010) and the aim was to utilise all instruments to access the voice of the participants. According to Maxcy (2003) using a mixed methods approach has changed the face of social science research and it was used in this research because the data generated is greater than choosing one of either qualitative or quantitative research (Creswell, 2009). The complex nature of inquiry is the reason pragmatists use a mixed methods approach because "the essential criteria for making design decisions are practical, contextually responsive, and consequential" (Datta, 1997, p. 34).

The decision to use a quantitative approach in stage one of this research was due to a number of key elements such as access to the participants, the level of information required and how it would be applied in stage two and subsequently stage three. Furthermore, the researcher also

believed that the participants had to be introduced to the research using a non-invasive approach due to their age (mean age of fourteen) and the questionnaire was an ideal method to do this. Using mixed methods and a three-stage approach to data collection was also deliberately applied as a mechanism to build trust with the participants over the duration of the study due to its longitudinal design. Initially, the research started out in 2012 with thirty-four participants in stage one, reducing to twelve for the focus groups (three groups with four participants in each) and eleven took part in the individual interviews in 2015. All eleven participants completed the three stages of the research ensuring that the longitudinal design was adhered to.

To ensure the research questions were answered in this study, the researcher took a decision to ensure the epistemology, ontology and axiology addressed the voice of the participants. Therefore, the decision to use pragmatism as a research paradigm was important because it had to consider four key questions concerning the practical consequences of the design decision which are as follows:

1. Can salient evaluation questions be adequately answered?
2. Can the design be successfully carried out, taking into consideration such issues as access to information, time available, evaluators' skills, and money or other resources required for the evaluation?
3. Are design trade-offs (for example, between depth of understanding and generalizability) optimized?
4. Are the results usable? (Datta, 1997, p. 35)

Using pragmatism allowed the researcher to implement a sequential design which meant that the study started with a quantitative method followed by a qualitative method that involved a detailed exploration of a specific group of individuals (Creswell, 2009). This was particularly important to the researcher because although the literature has been reviewed extensively, the topics identified needed to be tested. To test the topics identified in the literature, a questionnaire was chosen as the preferred option for three reasons: firstly, the researcher had worked with children in the past as a secondary school teacher and believed the questionnaire was a useful tool to introduce the participants to the research; secondly, the researcher was only afforded two opportunities to collect data from each of the three underage international teams, therefore the time available to collect data was limited (this did not include individual

interviews which took place away from the international team environment); and thirdly, it was critical that the key topics for the interviews (particularly for the focus groups) were identified in advance. This was because the cohort selected was very specific and therefore the reliability and validity of the research collected in the qualitative stage would be informed by the literature review, the careful design of the questionnaire and the information that it generated.

The alliance between the paradigm of pragmatism and a mixed methods research approach is better explained when we consider a number of factors. First of all, pragmatism supports the use of both quantitative and qualitative research methods, secondly the method chosen depends on the stage of the research, and thirdly pragmatism presents a practical and applied research philosophy rejecting metaphysical concepts such as truth and reality. Finally, pragmatist researchers consider the research questions to be more important than the method or paradigm used (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003).

3.1.3 Triangulation

To establish credibility in research, prolonged engagement in the field and the triangulation of the data sources are key to ensuring a rigorous data collection process (Creswell, 2007). This was achieved in this research due to its longitudinal nature and the common themes that arose in each of the three research approaches used. The benefit of using a mixed methods approach in this study is that it provided the opportunity to triangulate data gathered from the questionnaires, focus groups and individual interviews. Triangulation uses a multiple of data collection methods to explore a single phenomenon (Gratton & Jones, 2010). The advantage of using triangulation is that data can be validated using a number of different methods particularly if time constraints limit data collection (Bell, 2005). This applied to this research as time was limited for completing the focus groups in particular.

The data generated from all three data collection methods applied in this research, were used to strengthen the validity of the data analysis process. A vital component of this research was to actively listen to the voices of the participants and their experiences. Therefore, the qualitative approach in this research was particularly important (Gratton & Jones, 2010) but it is critical to note that the topics generated were developed from the literature and questionnaires. Using triangulation was beneficial because the data collection process was sequential allowing the data from each stage to be processed before progressing to the next stage. This provided an opportunity to refine the data collection topics, clarify data that was

collected from the previous stage thereby reducing error in the analysis stage. The disadvantages of using this approach is the research can become too focused and the participants become too familiar with the researcher and the topics being investigated. This could cause the participants to have pre-formulated answers to questions. However, triangulation of the data should identify these issues if they arise.

3.1.4 Ethics

Due to the age of the participants, it was clear that ethical considerations were necessary as they were all under eighteen at the commencement of the research project. Therefore, this research used three stages to ensure it followed a strict ethical approach. Stage one involved approval from the FAI, stage two was approval from Dublin City University and stage three involved getting consent from the participants through their parents/guardians to allow them to participate. Approval from the FAI was sought and granted by their Board of Management. This was followed by meetings with appropriate staff members who were responsible for managing the underage international teams. These staff members included the international head coaches for each of the underage teams and key members of their support staff. This was an important step in the ethical approach taken because it was used to allay any concerns or suspicion as to the nature of the research. Significantly, the FAI fully supported the research noting its importance and expressed their interest in the findings. However, before data collection can officially begin in academic research, approval needs to be provided by the relevant body in an academic institution such as a research or ethics committee (Rudestam & Newton, 2001; Bell, 2005). A research ethics application was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee at Dublin City University and ethics approval was granted in 2011 (Appendix 1).

Having received approval from the FAI and the ethics committee in Dublin City University, the next step was to seek consent from external gatekeepers, that is, the parents/guardians of the potential participants (Rudestam & Newton, 2001; McSharry, 2006; Gratton & Jones, 2010; Seidman, 2013). On reflection the researcher's role as an FAI staff member could understandably raise questions concerning the balance of power in the eyes of the participants and this, as well as bias, had to be carefully managed. This was achieved by ensuring that the participant's voice was central to the data collection and analysis processes. Other ethical considerations that were strictly adhered to included; confidentiality, ensuring the participants understood the purpose of the study and explaining that they could withdraw from the research at any stage (Creswell, 2007).

3.2 Sampling/Selection

Before completing any academic research, the researcher is expected to decide on the sample size and the selection process to investigate the topic under consideration (Creswell, 2007; Gratton & Jones, 2010; Bryman, 2012). Patton (1990) suggests that there are no specific rules concerning the sample size. However, he does suggest that consideration must be given to the resources and time available. For example, eligibility for the under fifteen squad was in principle every player involved in the FAI ETP for this age category which could have amounted to over 240 players.

To address the research questions posited, contacting 240 children from one age category was a pointless exercise as all of these children were simply not going to make the under fifteen international team. In addition to this, the aim of this research was to focus on a specific phenomenon rather than a universal approach (Gratton & Jones, 2010). Therefore, in order to identify the participants for this study a non-probability sample was applied, and the researcher used criterion sampling as participants were only selected based on the criteria set out prior to data collection (Rudestam & Newton, 2001). It is acknowledged that when a sample is not randomly selected it can create human bias (Bryman, 2012); however, this was avoided due to the specific criteria used to select participants which are detailed below.

3.2.1 Criteria for participation

The criteria for selecting the participants was as follows: (1) they were required to have been born in the Republic of Ireland and eligible to receive an Irish passport, (2) at the time of the study they were in second level education in Ireland or if they had migrated to a professional football club they had to have completed three years of secondary school in Ireland, (3) they had been selected to represent the Republic of Ireland at underage international level and (4) the year they were born was a key factor which will be explained later in this section. To explore the recruitment of potential participants, the researcher had a meeting with each of the FAI team operations executives. These FAI staff members were responsible for the logistics of each underage squad under investigation and they had all of the personal information in relation to potential participants. This was an important part of the process because it filtered out a number of the players selected in international squads. For example, children were not selected if they were under a care order or in foster care as the researcher did not want to impose any additional burdens on these families.

To be eligible for selection in any underage international team, football authorities use the player's date of birth. As the field research in this study was beginning in 2012, it was decided to select players eligible to participate in the UEFA European Under-17 Championship for the 2012-2013 competition. The European Under-17 Championship is the first official competition recognised by UEFA at international level. The age category to determine eligibility for the said competition is provided for in Article 17.02 of the competition's regulations which states:

> Players are eligible to play in the competition if they were born on or after 1 January 1996. (UEFA, 2011, p. 21)

Therefore, this follows that the selection of participants for this study could only include players participating in competitions for the Republic of Ireland at Under 16 level that were born on or after 1 January 1997 and for the Under 15 level they had to be born on or after 1 January 1998.

To investigate the voices of the participants and to provide an accurate reflection of their life course to become a professional footballer, it was critical that the sample was not "so large as to become so diffuse that a detailed and nuanced focus on something in particular becomes impossible" (Mason, 2002 cited in McSharry, 2006, p. 128). Therefore, it was decided that the sample size would be twenty participants per squad which amounts to a total of sixty players. When we consider that approximately twenty-three players are selected to play international football at each level (this figure includes five on the stand-by list), sixty players were considered as an appropriate representative sample. Furthermore, the sample size was based on a pragmatic approach due to the consideration of a number of additional factors. These included the limited amount of time the international teams meet each year, the time to access the participants when they came into camp was going to be extremely limited and the selection of players in international teams was not always consistent (Gratton & Jones, 2010).

3.2.2 Recruitment of the Participants

It was important to recruit participants that were going to be selected by the international head coach the next time the underage international teams were being called up. This process is generally completed a number of weeks in advance and as a consequence the researcher had a very short timeframe to get letters of consent posted out to parents/guardians and to get them

returned before each of the respective squads met. The exact number of parental consent forms sent out was sixty and included players from each of the three underage international squads including players on the stand-by list. A stand-by list is always necessary in case players in the main squad have to pull out due a number of reasons such as injury, sickness or a family bereavement. The postal addresses for each of the players selected were obtained from the FAI team operations executives. Each parent and their child received an information pack which contained a Plain Language Statement, Parental Consent form for parents and an Assent form for children. This was accompanied by a self-addressed envelope addressed to the researcher. From the sixty information packs which were sent out fifty parental consent forms and assent forms were returned.

3.2.3 Rationale for selection for stage two and three of the research process

Rather than randomly select the participants for stage two and stage three of the data collection process, choosing the participants was completed using two interlinked approaches; the first was to short list twenty-one players based on the answers they had provided on the questionnaire (seven participants from each age category). This process was undertaken by the researcher. Once this was completed, separate meetings were organised with the three underage international head coaches. The main purpose of these meetings was to discuss how the research was progressing, to identify future dates and locations for the focus groups and to discuss what players they thought would be best suited to participate in the next stages of the research.

From the list of seven players identified by the researcher in each age category, the international head coach from each age group was asked to select four players out of the seven who he believed had the most potential to go on to become a full-time professional footballer. The selection process of participants involving the international head coaches was critical for two main reasons; firstly, it included them in the process building a relationship of trust, secondly and more importantly it also ensured that the players selected were going to be in the next squad as only the international head coach knew who these players were likely to be. Although this introduces an element of bias in the selection process, having the expertise of underage international head coaches was invaluable knowledge to be utilised to ensure the best players were selected. This was also important due to the longitudinal nature of the research design.

The focus group sample was restricted to twelve participants (four from each age category) for a number of important factors. The first concerned the researcher's ability to access the squads who only gathered a couple of times each year. For example, when players are in camp it can be very difficult to find a time to meet with them because their schedule is planned hour by hour from the time they enter and leave. The limited opportunity to sit down with the squads is due to the fact that when they are with the international team, the head coach is either working directly with the players on and off the pitch or their time is allocated to study, eating and rest. Secondly, having a smaller group for the focus groups provided the participants with more time to contribute, which, it is argued produced a more rich and multi-dimensional range of data (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996). The mean age of the players who took part in stage two (focus groups) was fifteen years. The rationale for selecting the participants for the individual interview was very straightforward. Due to the longitudinal nature of the research, it provided the opportunity to complete the stage three interviews with the same participants from the focus group. Therefore, a new selection process was not necessary. The rationale for using the same participants in the individual interviews was to explore the lives of the participants over a period of time.

3.3 Materials

3.3.1 Questionnaires

When deciding to use questionnaires, it is important to consider a number of factors. The first consideration is; will it gather the information needed to address the research question(s); secondly, are other methods more appropriate and thirdly, why are other methods being excluded (Gratton & Jones, 2010). With all research methods there are advantages and disadvantages. For the researcher, the advantage of using a questionnaire included ease of data analysis, the limited accessibility to the participants and it provided a wider cohort response (Johnson & Turner, 2003). However, some disadvantages can include participants not understanding questions and the inability of the researcher to probe or expand on answers provided (Johnson & Turner, 2003; Gratton & Jones, 2010). However, the latter was addressed through the use of other data collection methods later in the research (focus groups and individual interviews) and triangulation in the analysis of the data.

With researchers advocating a short questionnaire to maximise a response rate (Johnson & Turner, 2003; Gratton & Jones, 2010), the age of the respondents in this study was significant.

Bryman (2012) suggests that a self-completion questionnaire must be easy to follow, and the questions should be easy to answer. The structure of the questionnaire was developed by using the literature reviewed and in consultation with my supervisor. Initially, a draft list of sixty questions was developed from this process and later reduced to thirty-one consisting of listed, closed-ended, and open-ended questions. The questionnaire was also divided into four sections; section one – football background, section two – football career, section three – the football environment and section four – home, school and other interests (Appendix 2).

The aim of section one was to capture information concerning the participants' involvement with football, for example, who influenced them to get involved, if they had been on trial with any specific teams and how many international caps they had to date. Section two examined the participants' attitudes to their future career in football such as the chance of making it as a professional footballer and if they felt they needed to migrate to do so. Section three examined their relationship with the football environment such as the teams they played with and how many days a week they contributed to football. Section four captured information about their attitudes to their academic education such as an alternative career to professional football, if they wanted to go to college and what was a priority for them at that point in time, football or school. All of the information gathered created an individual profile of each player.

Although the use of quantitative methods for analysis is based on the accumulation of numerical measurement, the use of the self-completion questionnaires in this research served other purposes for two reasons. The first concerned capturing data specific to the research questions and secondly it was used to gather information to develop the main topics for discussion in the focus groups and individual interviews which were to follow at a later stage. Interestingly, Bryman (2012) lists many researchers who have used a similar mixed methods approach; however, they used a qualitative approach initially. This included using individual interviews and focus groups to clarify concepts, address misunderstandings and adapt questions in a questionnaire before it was completed by participants. This approach was also used by Hammond (2005) but instead she referred to it as a multi-method approach rather than a mixed method approach and similar to this research, she also triangulates the data.

Using questionnaires developed by other researchers is useful if the purpose is to compare research. However, it is difficult to rely on the appropriateness of other researchers' instruments as it leaves little room to change the questions or format to reflect one's own research questions.

Significantly, the questionnaire was a very useful tool for this research to introduce the participants to the study. On reflection, this was a particularly important decision due to the young age of the participants, particularly the under fifteen group who were at a relatively early stage in their football career. Therefore, it is argued that an individual interview at this point would simply not have been a suitable approach and the questionnaire was ideal due to the context. This highlights the pragmatic decision-making process concerning the methodology and is what Datta (1997) refers to as being contextually responsive because it involves considering the demands, opportunities, and constraints of each situation.

3.3.2 Focus Groups and Individual Interviews

For the purposes of data collection in this research two forms of interview approaches were used; focus groups and individual interviews (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Although very time consuming (Bryman, 2012), the use of qualitative research was particularly important to the researcher because the voice of the participant and their subjective position was crucial to ensuring the research questions were addressed (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Being an Irish underage international footballer is such a unique experience and because it is limited to a select few, it is fascinating to get access to their world and hear how they and their individual identities have been shaped and reshaped as a result of the cultural experience football provides. Plummer (2010) suggests that we are all active agents who not only make social worlds but make them work for us. Therefore, the application of qualitative research provides a rich understanding of an individual's social world because it is their interpretation of it (Gratton & Jones, 2010).

Focus Group

The criteria for selecting the twelve participants for the focus groups was primarily based on the participants who had successfully completed a questionnaire in stage one of the data collection process and who would be in the squad when the international team met again. An important component of the focus groups was the inclusion of the main themes generated from the questionnaire to initiate dialogue with the participants. This was useful because they were familiar with the main topics of the research (Bell, 2005). However, the researcher was careful not to follow the questionnaire's format of questions to prevent a formal structured approach from developing. Although, the data captured from the questionnaires were fundamental to how the questions were developed, rather than a set of specific questions to follow, a guide was developed to serve as a checklist to ensure key topics were covered (Patton, 1990).

This provided the opportunity to expand on the data already gathered, understand the reasoning for the answers provided in the questionnaires, whilst also addressing any gaps that still remained. For example, the participants selected football as more important that their schoolwork in the questionnaire. However, understanding the answer to this question could only be reliably validated by speaking to the participants themselves. Therefore, using focus groups was an important element of the data collection process. However, it would have been impractical to complete the focus groups outside of the underage international camp setting because the participants were from different locations across the country.

Individual interviews

The individual interview was an opportunity to meet the participants one to one to allow them to tell their individual stories. It is suggested that having credibility and establishing a rapport with participants plays a key role in the effectiveness of an interview in academic research (Fontana & Frey, 2005; Gratton & Jones, 2010; Kelly, 2010). Having gathered very important data in stage one and two, the interviews were seen as an opportunity to explore the lives of each individual and the reasons they had made specific decisions concerning their career journey to date. This was significant for two main reasons; firstly, it provided the opportunity to triangulate all of the data in the research and secondly, it was an opportunity to capture the participants' lives at a point in time when they were still on their journey to become a first-team professional footballer which contributes to the uniqueness of this research. Prior to developing the questions for the individual interviews, the data that had been collected from the questionnaires and focus groups were reviewed. This identified themes for further exploration and the opportunity to address gaps that still remained. Using an interview guide was important (Appendix 3) because every interview flows differently and as a consequence the wording of questions and the structure of how they are delivered varies (Rudestam & Newton, 2001).

The sample for the individual interviews included the same participants from the focus groups. Importantly, when the individual interviews commenced many of these participants had transitioned to the UK to join professional football club. Therefore, questions were developed to examine this transition. This could not have been dealt with in the focus groups because many had not yet reached the age (sixteen) to migrate. This was significant because it enabled to researcher to specifically focus on the school-work transition and if supports were in place

to assist in this process. Additionally, it was important to investigate the reasons why some of the participants had not migrated and therefore the interview questions needed to be formulated to address this issue and the possibility of the sensitivity around this. It is acknowledged that the individual interview was a more daunting prospect than the focus groups requiring different interview techniques and a clear understanding of the participant's profile and family background.

3.4 Data Collection

With limited opportunities for squads to meet, the Irish international football environment can be a unique closed off social world which is similar to other football environments (Brackenridge et al., 2004; Kelly, 2010). This is due to the limited time international managers have with the players because of their commitments to their clubs in Ireland or in the UK. Therefore, the schedule from when players arrive in camp and leave is tightly managed which means that the opportunity to access each of the three underage international squads to collect data required careful organisation and planning. As previously stated, establishing relationships with key gatekeepers is an important component of academic research if the data collection process is to run smoothly (Fontana & Frey, 2005; Creswell, 2007; Gratton & Jones, 2010).

The FAI international team operations executives were critical in stage one and two of the data collection process. The assistance they provided to the researcher included preplanning, so a strategy could be implemented to collect the data, as well as administering the questionnaire and providing assistance organising the focus groups. This was important because data collection took place at different times and across a number of different sites for the three underage international teams. The questionnaire was administered to the international teams at three different time points in 2012 capturing data from thirty-four participants. The three focus groups took place with twelve participants from the original cohort of thirsty-four participants. This also involved data collection at three different time points, two in 2012 and one in 2013. The last phase of data collection took place in 2015 with eleven of the same participants from the cohort of twelve in the focus groups. These interviews took place in eleven separate locations. The next section will provide an overview of the how the longitudinal design was implemented in the data collection phase of this research.

3.4.1 Administering the questionnaire

Having received fifty Parental Consent forms and Assent forms, it was decided to get these participants to fill out the questionnaire when they attended the next international camp. The purpose of taking this approach was to ensure that the participants completed the questionnaire themselves without any undue influence. At the next three camps eleven participants out of the fifty had not been selected by the international head coach. As a result, the sample size was reduced to thirty-nine participants. Out of the thirty-nine questionnaires received back, five were spoiled leaving thirty-four fully completed surveys to analyse (thirteen from the under-fifteens, eleven from the under sixteens and ten from the under seventeens).

The schedule to administer the questionnaires was determined by the date the underage squads were called up by the international head coach. The first questionnaire was given to the under sixteen squad who were in camp in March 2012, the second questionnaire was given to the under seventeens who were in camp in April 2012 for friendly fixtures and the final questionnaire was given to the under fifteens in October 2012 who were in camp during the mid-term break to prepare for a trip to the Aspire Academy in December 2012. The researcher provided strict instructions to the FAI international team operations executives to administer the questionnaire during the participants' study period for practical reasons, such as having a desk and it was a quiet time with no distractions. Once the questionnaires were completed by each group, the FAI international team operations executives returned them in a sealed envelope.

Given that the research design was longitudinal, this provided a sample of thirty-four players to select for stage two and three of the data collection process. This is referred to as phenomenological research because the focus of the data collection was on a specific category of individuals, that is, underage Irish international footballers. Additionally, Rudestam and Newton (2001) argue that most phenomenological studies take place over a longer period of time whilst engaging a relatively smaller number of participants. This is particularly interesting with Sparkes (2000) suggesting that, rather than the 'amount' of subjects in a study, the focus should be the 'amount' of quality data that is produced.

3.4.2 Focus Groups

Having completed the questionnaires, the focus groups took place with the three underage teams in late 2012 (under sixteens and seventeens) and early 2013 (under fifteens). Prior to the focus groups taking place, the researcher and supervisor had a meeting to discuss the key areas that warranted further exploration. The ages of the participants at the time of the focus groups ranged from fourteen to sixteen with a mean age of fifteen years. Only one of the participants had recently joined a professional football club abroad and the other eleven were resident in Ireland and living with their families. In addition to this, choosing focus groups as a research method was largely influenced by the limited time the researcher had with the participants. With only sixty minutes allocated by the international head coach, individual interviews would not have been possible when the players were in camp due to their busy schedule. This is an example of how pragmatism as a philosophical approach provided flexibility to collect data to suit the social context. As all of the focus groups took place when the underage international squads were in camp preparing for international fixtures, it was a very stressful part of the data collection process and required a significant amount of planning and organising. Each of the three focus groups were recorded, lasted approximately eighty minutes in duration and they took place over a seven-month period commencing in August 2012 and ending in March 2013. The under seventeen international players were in camp for two friendly matches against Azerbaijan in August 2012 in preparation for the under seventeen 2012-2013 European championship tournament. The date of the focus group was organised with the FAI international team operations executive and Sunday the 26th of August 2012 was agreed. The location of the focus group was a hotel the players and staff were staying in. The under sixteen international players were in camp to prepare for two friendly fixtures versus Estonia which were scheduled to take place on the 20th and 22nd of November 2012. The researcher who had been in contact with the under sixteen international head coach had agreed for the focus group to take place on Monday the 19th of November 2012 in the team hotel in Dublin. None of the players were with professional football clubs abroad but similar to the under fifteen group, they had already formed strong relationship with professional football clubs in the UK.

The under fifteen international players were being called up to represent Ireland in two friendly fixtures with professional football clubs in the UK, namely Wolverhampton Wanderers Football Club and Brighton and Hove Albion Football Club. In advance of the focus group, the researcher contacted the FAI international team operations executive to see what day and time

was suitable to meet the under fifteen players. The FAI international team operations executive had to consult with the team's head coach and the 10th of March 2013 was agreed. On the day of the focus group, the researcher arrived at the team hotel in Dublin an hour early and immediately looked for the international head coach rather than any other staff member. This was important because it allowed the researcher to ascertain if the focus groups could go ahead as organised as there had been some uncertainty on the day due to scheduling.

3.4.3 Individual Interviews

In total, eleven one-to-one semi-structured interviews took place between June and September in 2015 to examine how the life course of each of the participants had developed since the focus groups had taken place. Due to the longitudinal design of the research, this was a key phase of the data collection process as it was the last opportunity to meet the players to collect data to complete the process of triangulation. It was also a critical period for the researcher to reflect on the data collected up to that point. Each interview began with two football photographs, one of the FC Barcelona team lifting the Champions league having defeated Juventus in the final in June 2015 and the other was a photograph of Lionel Messi, considered to be one of the best players ever to play the game, with his four Ballon d'Or trophies.

According to Creswell (2007) using photographs to elicit responses is a unique approach and in this study, these photographs were used as ice-breakers to discuss football generally and to relax the participants. On each occasion, the participants acknowledged that winning the Champions league was one of the most important competitions in the world with a number of them referencing the closeness of the FC Barcelona team. In relation to Lionel Messi all of the participants compared themselves in some way to him (usually negatively) noting his exceptional ability even though he was not big in physical stature. Although this interaction might seem trivial, it was an excellent way of beginning the interview and created a commonality between the participants and researcher. It also allowed the interview to commence with a conversation about football rather than their opinions about more serious topics such as education or preparing for an alternative career after football.

3.4.4 Setting

For each of the individual interviews, contact was made with the participant's parents who were key gatekeepers if the individual interviews were to take place. Completing the individual interviews was particularly difficult due to scheduling. As previously stated, this was because

a number of the participants were with professional football clubs abroad and therefore the opportunity to access them for an interview was only possible when they returned home for holidays. Generally, the holiday period for young footballers is Christmas and during the summer time. It was decided that the summer time provided more flexibility as the participants were home for a longer period.

The majority of the individual interviews, nine out of eleven, were completed in the family home in either the sitting room or the kitchen which the researcher believed put the participants at ease as they were in their home surroundings providing the environment to speak freely. In fact, in all cases, the participants' parents provided coffee and biscuits making the experience even more homely. In some cases, interruptions occurred such as the home telephone ringing or family members walking in on the interview. However, although this might be seen as a distraction, this created what the researcher considered to be a more 'normal' environment allowing the participants to reflect on the experiences in their lives in an open and unrestricted way.

Two of the individual interviews did not take place in the family home. One took place in a hotel meeting room and the other took place in a coffee shop. Although the hotel meeting room was a suitable venue, it was a very formal setting and lacked the same personal feel when compared to the interviews completed in the family home. The individual interview in the coffee shop was close to where the participant's father's business was so it was chosen based on convenience rather than suitability. Although this interview produced some excellent material, the coffee shop was extremely busy as it was a Saturday, and the noise and close proximity of the other customers added additional difficulty that had not been experienced previously. Luckily, the participant was confident, articulate and familiar with the setting and although the researcher found the setting demanding, the participant was visibly at ease. All of the individual interviews were recorded and took approximately eighty to ninety minutes.

3.5 Data Analysis

Whilst acknowledging that this research was underpinned by pragmatism as a philosophical approach, this section will examine the complex process of using a sequential explanatory design to analyse the data. Given that this research was predominantly qualitative in nature, the findings from the quantitative data analysed are not directly presented in the analysis chapters.

Instead they were integrated during the interpretive stage of the analysis and will be reviewed throughout this section. The analysis strategy adopted for this research involved three phases. Phase one was concerned with the analysis of the questionnaires, phase two examined the focus group data and phase three analysed the data which emerged from the individual interviews. This is what Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie (2003, p. 367, emphasis in original) refer to as "*sequential quantitative-qualitative analysis*". Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie (2003) suggest that there are seven steps in mixed methods data analysis: data reduction, data display, data transformation, data correlation, data consolidation, data comparison and data integration. Although this seven-step process may be a useful guide, it is important to note that research is sequential and not linear because the phases of research analysis can be repeated over the lifetime of the research (Rudestam & Newton, 2001). The most important consideration for all researchers is to get the raw material collected, recorded, transcribed, analysed and interpreted (Bell, 2005; Bryman, 2012).

For the purposes of analysis, it was critical that the approach adopted supported the unique voice of the participants (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006) whilst ensuring that the rigour of the data could be supported (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003). This was to ensure that the analysis process was adequate in order to address the research questions (Gratton & Jones, 2010), whilst also considering the participants' social context and how this might constrain their thinking and decision making in relation to their future career choices and decisions. These considerations resulted in four analysis chapters. The sequential explanatory design (Creswell, 2009) employed for this research was chosen for two key reasons; firstly, it ensured the three data collection stages were connected by using the quantitative results to shape the qualitative sampling and data collection. This ensured that the data generated from the quantitative analysis could be used during the qualitative stage to establish why and how specific themes and relationships were occurring. The second reason was to use all of the findings generated from the three stages of analysis in the interpretation phase of the study (Creswell, 2009). Although, the interpretation phase of the research was challenging due to the range of data gathered, it is argued that this strengthens the validity and rigour of the research findings.

3.5.1 Questionnaire

The data from the questionnaires from the three underage international teams were combined for analysis purposes. Although the profile of the three groups varied slightly, for example, in terms of their age, international appearances and the schoolboy leagues they played in, the

principle aim of the data analysis for this stage was to identify common themes based on the information provided by the participants. Therefore, using the thirty-one questions (consisting of listed questions, closed-ended questions and open-ended questions), the data analysis process focused primarily on generating descriptive statistics that related specifically to answering the research questions (Cresswell, 2009). The thirty-four questionnaires were individually reviewed and the results from each questionnaire were recorded. As the questionnaires generated both qualitative and quantitative data for the purposes of analysis, specific focus was placed on the descriptive statistics generated only. The qualitative data was used to inform the development of the questions for the focus groups and individual interviews.

Creswell (2009) suggests that one of the benefits of using a sequential model includes instrument development. This allows the researcher to identify themes that can be used to create an instrument which is grounded on the participants' views. Therefore, the significance of analysing the data in stage one provided the opportunity to test variables with a larger sample before exploring a more in-depth approach in the qualitative stage (focus groups and individual interviews) (Creswell et al., 2003). As a result, the data analysed from the questionnaires was critical for the development of questions in the qualitative stage of the research. This is known as using sequential methods for sampling or question design where the collection of quantitative data is used as a basis for selecting a sample for qualitative interviewing (Bazeley, 2003).

The descriptive statistics comprised of percentages (Appendix 4) providing easier comparison of the data collected and where possible this also included cross-tabulation (Gratton & Jones). This process resulted in clear identifiable themes such as the importance of the family for the participants, their priority for their football development compared to their academic education, going on trials, and their preference for migration rather than staying in Ireland to pursue their football career. Although already noted, the descriptive statistical data from the questionnaire was not presented in the analysis chapters, this data was used to support the interpretation of the themes identified in at stage two (focus groups) and at stage three (individual interviews) of the data analysis process.

3.5.2 Focus Group and Individual Interviews

Stage one

The first step in any data analysis process, particularly qualitative data, involves preparing and organising the data for analysis (Creswell, 2009). In this research, this involved transferring the raw data collected from voice recordings to transcribed text (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006). The three focus groups generated 126 pages and over 33,000 words of transcribed text. The individual interviews generated 354 pages and over 150,000 words of transcribed text. Although the analysis of the qualitative data from the focus groups and individual interviews was completed at different time periods, the process of analysis was the same. Therefore, this section will outline the process used to analyse the qualitative data collected whilst ensuring to clearly distinguish between the focus groups and individual interviews.

Stage two

The next stage involved manually reviewing the qualitative data generated from the focus groups and individual interviews. This involved repeatedly listening to the recordings whilst following the verbatim text (Creswell, 2009). This process was useful for two reasons; firstly, it allowed the researcher to review all of the transcripts in-depth by identifying any mistakes between the recordings and the transcribed text (Bryman, 2012). This was a particularly important exercise for the data analysis because it ensured that the data transcribed authenticated what was recorded during the data collection phase (Patton, 1990). Secondly, it allowed the researcher to add in any additional comments (Patton, 1990; Creswell, 2007; Gratton & Jones, 2010) such as the tone of the participant's voice, facial expressions, silences, how they were sitting and their body language. This process continued until all errors had been corrected and comments captured (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). It was critical to complete this process as soon as possible to ensure all details were recorded to reflect the accuracy of the data for analysis (Bryman, 2012).

Stage three

Stage three involved conducting content analysis which is the process of identifying codes to categorise the data (Patton, 1990; Bryman, Stephen & A Campo, 1996). To develop the codes, it involved repeatedly listening to the recordings and reading the verbatim texts. This stage was concerned with data reduction and involved labelling the transcribed text including the observational data gathered such as tone of voice and body language (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie,

2003). To do this, sections of the verbatim text were coded using a specific word and colour or what are often referred to as labels (Patton, 1990; Bryman, 2012) and this ranged from one line or paragraphs (Gratton & Jones, 2010). Coding allows researchers to break down large volumes of transcribed data into manageable components (Bryman, 2012). For example, any reference the participants made concerning the influence of their family was coded 'family' and highlighted green. This process continued until the data was fully reviewed with sections allocated either a colour code or an observational comment. These observations are what Bryman (2012) and Charmaz (2000) refer to as memo writing and this process allowed the researcher to remain focussed on the analysis. Memo writing is the intermediate step between coding and completing the first draft of the analysis. This facilitates the exploration of the data in a way that provides a deeper understanding of the codes to structure and sort the data (Charmaz, 2000). Critically, the application of content analysis helped distinguish patterns within the transcripts (Patton, 1990; Bryman, 2012).

Stage four

Using content analysis in stage three facilitated the identification of a set of inductive themes and this supported the development of the fourth stage of the data analysis process which involved generating themes (Giulianotti, 1997; Creswell, 2009). Five themes emerged from the focus group analysis: moving from the local club, influence of family, pressure caused by the football environment, the relationship between football and school and their future career. These themes were selected based on the literature reviewed, the research questions and the quality and consistency of the data collected. Once this was complete, key sections of the verbatim text from these themes identified were placed carefully in a separate document.

The development of themes from the individual interviews followed the same process of analysis as the focus groups, however because this body of work was significantly larger, it required a slightly different approach in terms of managing the data. This involved placing the eleven interviews into one Microsoft word document thus making it easier to review the data. Due to the volume of the data generated from the individual interviews, the coding process and memo writing took significantly longer but it provided the means to group the text into segments which represented specific themes (Bryman, 2012). In total, thirty-six separate themes with varying lengths of data emerged. Using the same approach as that of the focus groups, the verbatim texts for each theme were transferred into a separate document. Having

generated specific themes from the data analysis, the last link in the analysis process was to proceed to the integration stage (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003).

Stage five - Integrating and Interpreting the data

Integrating the themes identified in the analysis stages was critical to complete the final piece of the sequential explanatory design process (Creswell, 2009). This stage involved transferring all of the data segments or verbatim texts from each theme into one final analysis document. Once this was completed, the researcher moved on to the interpretation stage of the data analysis and using what Bryman (2012) refers to as categorisation, four main themes were identified, namely; the football environment in Ireland, transition from amateur football to professional football, combining football and school, and the process of migration. Integrating the themes from the data analysis stages was an important step because it enabled the researcher to focus on a deeper analytical understanding of the data.

The final stage of the coding process involved the development of sub themes where appropriate. For example, from the 'football environment in Ireland', sub-themes began to emerge such as: the role of the family, early career decisions, football career development in Ireland, and choices and consequences. However, when using coding, there is a risk that the narrative flow of what the participants said might become disorganised (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). However, in this research the entire coding process not only provided organised data for the analysis chapters, it also provided the opportunity to organise the themes sequentially to display how the participants career in football developed from an early age right through to the individual interview in 2015. This provided a logical structure to analyse the data in a way that allowed the life story of the participants to develop creating a chronological pattern. Once this was completed the researcher interpreted each piece of text with particular emphasis on the literature reviewed and the theoretical framework with a principle focus on ensuring the research questions were addressed.

3.6 Validity and Reliability

The choice of research method used can only be truly validated by producing reliable data. The reliability of data, according to Bell (2005) is to produce similar results under constant conditions on all occasions. To highlight the reliability of the data in this study, a detailed description of the coding process has been provided in section 3.5. However, additional

measures were also utilised such as triangulation of the data and the data analysis process was critiqued by the researchers' two supervisors. Importantly however, was confirmation that the research data generated, analysed and interpreted answered the research questions postulated at the beginning of the research project (Gratton & Jones, 2010). It is also critical for researchers to consider their ethical responsibilities including the researcher's position relative to the group involved in the data collection process (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). The researcher was very mindful that this study was being completed in his place of work. To ensure the reliability and validity of the data, it was critical that the participants felt at ease during the data collection process and were free to openly express themselves. This was demonstrated by one of the participants opting out of the research at the individual interview stage.

The researcher was also very conscious about how difficult it might be to report data that could reflect negatively about the FAI, colleagues or the structure of the game in Ireland generally (Creswell, 2007). However, studying in one's 'backyard' as Creswell aptly puts it was not a concern for the researcher and all findings were going to be reported irrespective of the professional implications that may have arisen. Moreover, during the interpretation stage of the data, the researcher made a conscious decision to report all findings if applicable to answering the research questions. There are also a number of additional threats to the reliability of research data that include researcher error and what Gratton and Jones (2010) refer to as subject error that occurs if different responses are provided at different stages of the research. Although this was not an issue in this study, Creswell (2007) notes that participants can be hesitant to provide information in the focus group setting.

For the researcher, the reliability and validity of research is best illustrated by allowing the research participants speak for themselves and to achieve this, the verbatim texts of the participants were used to ensure their voices were heard (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Using direct quotes, it is suggested, can bring research findings to life making them much more readable (Gratton & Jones, 2010). However, Johnson and Turner (2003) argue that when conducting mixed methods research it is important for the researcher to understand that all methods have strengths and also limitations. Therefore, it is argued that combining quantitative and qualitative methods actually addresses the limitations of using one method over another (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). Finally, one could argue that the validity of the research could be questioned because the sample chosen was small. The reason for the sample size has been explained in detail throughout this chapter and for the researcher, the test of successful

research is not about unearthing an endless quantity of unique individuals but rather illuminating the lives of a few well-chosen (Sears, 1992).

3.7 Summary

It is acknowledged that there are different views relating to how the nature of social reality is understood including the diverse epistemological assumptions about what is accepted as knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Therefore, this chapter started with a brief overview of positivism and interpretivism showing that they are two mutually exclusive paradigms concerning reality and what they consider as knowledge. As a consequence, they have very different ontological and epistemological viewpoints including the data collection methods they deem acceptable (Gratton and Jones, 2010). Therefore, this follows that the criteria and approach used for all research can be challenged (Smith & Hodkinson, 2005). For Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) choosing to use a pragmatic approach provides a choice of techniques and opportunities to gather data. The key point being made in this chapter is that a mixed methods approach did not limit the research; rather, it nourished and expanded the understanding of the career decision-making process of young Irish talented footballers.

Using a mixed methods approach in this study not only provided a voice to young footballers, it should provide a better understanding of the relationship between structure and agency particularly in relation to the choices they face and how they are presented to them. It will also help to understand the influence this has on their identity and attitude to education in light of the variety of transitions they make. To answer the research questions postulated in this study, the voice of the participants was the foundation on which the methodology was centred. Therefore, the primary focus was to collect and "produce useful results that are valid, reliable, and believable" (Patton, 1990, p. 61). Failing to use methods of research that are available is not only puerile, but it is a failure to provide knowledge that is available for extraction and analysis. Moreover, Patton (1990) argues that routine ways of thinking and habit can constrain methodological flexibility and creativity and instead focus should be placed on methodological appropriateness by responding to situations as they arise.

Finally, data collection that captures the lives of children or young people through a mixed methods approach provides a freedom to examine different contexts (social, economic and cultural) at a particular point in time, permitting a deeper understanding of how the participants

interpret ‘their’ social worlds (Gratton & Jones, 2010). It is argued that social situations constrain the way people think and act (Roderick, 2003), therefore, completing research on how young talented footballers choose a career in professional football provides their interpretation of how they view their social situation. Pragmatism ensured the researcher was not constrained by having to choose a specific method of data collection over another. It is argued that all approaches used in this study contributed to the research in its own unique way whilst addressing any weaknesses or limitations which may have also arisen. The validity and reliability of the research, it is argued can only be achieved by answering the research questions and using a longitudinal research design was key to achieving this.

> Pragmatism argues that the most important determinant of the epistemology, ontology and axiology you adopt is the research question – one may be more appropriate than the other for answering particular questions. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009, p. 109)

Introducing the Data Analysis Chapters

The data was analysed as outlined in the methodology chapter and this resulted in the emergence of over forty themes. In keeping with the theoretical framework of the study and the research questions that needed to be addressed, these themes were analysed further. Following this analysis, the data generated four analysis chapters enabling the researcher to present the data sequentially. Not only did this answer the four research questions, it captured the career decisions of the participants over specific periods of time. A principle theme emerged in each chapter including sub themes that were used to support the findings from the research.

The first principle theme in chapter four 'the football environment in Ireland' addressed the first research question - How do social and cultural factors influence the career decision-making process to become a professional footballer and who facilitates this process?

The second principle theme in chapter five 'transition from amateur football to professional football' addressed the second research question - How do Irish underage international footballers interact with the football environment to advance their career progression?

The third principle theme in chapter six 'combining football and school' addressed the third research question - What is the role of education in the occupational career choice of Irish underage international footballers and how can a dual career path be supported?

The fourth principle theme in chapter seven 'the process of migration (transition)' addressed the fourth research question - Are young Irish talented footballers who migrate to a professional football club supported during their school-work transition and what supports are necessary to support successful transitions?

The sub themes which emerged under each of the key themes will be outlined and discussed in each of the following data analysis chapters. The rationale for presenting the themes in four chapters is to facilitate the longitudinal design of this research in a way that chronicles the lives of the participants. This also allowed an easier comparison of the various routines, turning points and transitions that helped shape the participants' life course. It is important to note that some of the themes that emerged are evident in more than one chapter, as they may have emerged at different time points across the participants' journeys.

Chapter 4 – The Beginning of Career Formation

4.0 Introduction

Careership theory, developed by Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson (1996) will be used to assist our understanding of how individuals are positioned in the complex interaction of social contexts (Andersson & Barker-Ruchti, 2018). The interaction of the context and the individual, shapes what careership theory refers to as horizons for action which is how individuals' view the objective world from their perspective. Horizons for action are in a sense our view of the world at a point in time. It not only enables how we see the world, as our habitus modifies with the intake of new information, it also prevents or limits our viewpoint beyond what we see from our perspective (Hodkinson, 2008). An important question when examining career decision making is whether we can escape our own perspective to make a truly informed decision?

Our choice of career is an excellent example of this complex interaction in practice (Foskett & Hemsley-Brown, 1999; Coupland, 2015; Andersson & Barker-Ruchti, 2018) and can be illustrated through the careful analysis of young Irish footballers whose career aspirations are to become professional footballers. It has been suggested that football is one of the few professions (along with some other sports, as well as music and dance) that attempt to target future employees at such an early age, both emotionally and contractually (McGillivray, Fern & McIntosh, 2005). This chapter will present the analysis on the first theme in this study, the football environment in Ireland and will be analysed and discussed in line with the four sub themes which emerged: the role of the family, early career decisions, football career development in Ireland, and choices and consequences.

4.1 Getting started in football – the role of family

The family plays a very significant part in the lives of children (Coakley & White, 1992; Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996; Giddens, 1997; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997; Ball, Maguire & Macrae, 2000; Bourke, 2003; De Róiste & Dinneen, 2005; Coakley, 2006, 2009; Lalor, De Róiste & Devlin, 2007; Pitchford, 2007b; Blackburn, 2008; Churchland, 2011) and this also applies to children's career development (Poole et al., 1991; Young & Friesen, 1992; Whiston & Keller, 2004; Lindstrom et al., 2007; Keller & Whiston, 2008) and their introduction to and participation in sport (Andersson & Barker-Ruchti, 2018). The relationship between child development and sport began to flourish from the late nineteenth century

(Pitchford, 2007b). This was due to the acknowledgement that the social environments children participate in play a significant role in their development (Coakley, 2009).

There is strong evidence to suggest that the development of elite athletes is, inter alia, related to the environment they are exposed to at an early age (Côté et al., 2006). Therefore, becoming a professional footballer, may involve an early introduction to the formal game of association football through joining a club, participating in training, and progressing to competitions that are structured by rules and regulations. For the participants in this study their introduction to the formal game of football ranged from four years old to ten years old. It is interesting to note that if a participant's father had an active role in their introduction to football, their involvement commenced at an earlier age (four to six years old). However, when a father was not involved in introducing his child to the game through a football club, for reasons such as not being in the family home or having no involvement in a formal capacity with the game, participants were introduced to formal football at a later age (eight to ten years old).

Research completed by Ward et al. (2007) found that football players identified their parents as the greatest influence on their participation. During the individual interview Mark suggested that his father's influence was key to his participation in football rather than any other sport:

> "My parents definitely had a lot of emphasis on what I chose to do. Like, if my dad had played tennis I probably wouldn't be here today [playing football], I'd probably be playing tennis somewhere." (Mark – individual interview)

Careership theory argues that career decisions are pragmatically rational and deeply rooted in the habitus of the individual making the decision and Mark's point demonstrates how individual habitus (i.e. preferences, attitudes, dispositions) is shaped by family background. For Bourdieu (1992, p. 52, emphasis in original), our habitus is developed in a world in which "the objects of knowledge are constructed…and…the principles of this construction is the system of structured, structuring dispositions, the *habitus*". Therefore, if we are to understand how humans develop their habitus over time, investigating the social contexts children interact within, such as sport, school and family, is critical. Individuals develop particular attitudes, behaviours and ways of acting within specific contexts or fields (Allin & Humberstone, 2006). The family is ideally placed to significantly influence a child's learning and to shape their habitus (Bourdieu, 1992; Giddens, 1997; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Coakley (2006)

suggests that children's participation in youth sports is strongly influenced by the family habitus, the socialisation process or what parents believe to be the experiences that will best facilitate the development of their children. Young and Friesen (1992, p. 198) use the term "intentional action" to explain that when parents assist in their children's development they may, consciously or unconsciously, be attempting to "enhance their own development as parents".

Of the participants in this research, Liam had the earliest introduction to football when he was brought by his father from the age of two to see his uncle playing football in Ireland's professional football league (the League of Ireland). Although Liam did not have a clear memory of this specific event due to his age, based on photographs taken by his family on the day, he identified this event as his introduction to football. Liam's uncle playing football at the highest level in Ireland may indicate his family's deep connection to the game and explain why he was exposed to the formal game from such an early age. Liam's introduction to playing football in a formal capacity was initiated by his father, who brought him over to the local football club at the age of four. This experience was also shared by Noah who was introduced to organised football at five:

> "I was, I think I was five when I started, and my Dad helped me get into it. Went to the local club Hawthorn United (DDSL club) and that's how it all began." (Noah – individual interview)

For Noah, his father was not only responsible for him joining Hawthorn United, but he was also his football manager from the age of five until he left to join a professional football club abroad. Noah's father played a significant role in shaping the football environment Noah was exposed to in Ireland, and appears to have recruited the best players from other teams to facilitate his son's development:

> "See I have always been good so, but my Dad see, we got, I had good players around me, so I never really thought like, obviously when I moved to England there is going to be better players, but I never thought like I needed to move on [to another club in Ireland]. I just enjoyed playing it all the time, that's what made me." (Noah – individual interview)

Family plays a central role introducing children to sports but more importantly in encouraging and enabling them to stay involved and by providing them with opportunities (Coakley & White, 1992; De Róiste & Dinneen, 2005; Lalor, De Róiste & Devlin, 2007; Brown & Potrac, 2009; Coakley, 2009; Andersson & Barker-Ruchti, 2018). Noah spoke of having a strong relationship with his father. It is important to understand the significance of Noah's comment above when he says, "we got" because he quickly corrected himself to say, "I had good players around me". It was evident from being with Noah that he believed he had been working with his father to build a team for him to achieve his career goal to become a professional footballer. As well as recruiting players for the team he played on, Noah also stated that his father played him in different positions throughout his football development allowing him to learn every aspect of the game from a positional sense. Noah even had a personal trainer from the age of thirteen.

However, to support their child, parents need to recognise that sport is a socially constructed system (O'Rourke et al., 2011) or what Bourdieu might refer to as a field which he notes is "a network, or a configuration, of objective relations" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 97). This is relevant because it provides a deeper understanding of the role of sport in society. The unique position of individual sports in society, such as football, apply their own values, discourse, how to act and behave and specify what capital is of value (Bourke, 2003; McGillivray, Fern & McIntosh, 2005; Roderick, 2006b). For example, the skills displayed on the football pitch are universally identifiable and form the basis of the desired capital needed to succeed in this high-profile environment (Brown & Potrac, 2009). Significantly, parents need to understand that in professional sports environments their children may be used as a resource to "produce value in terms of income and recognition on the pitch for the benefit of the individual, the club and the industry more broadly" (Coupland, 2015, p. 115). Therefore, if a child develops the necessary skills or capital at a young age and has a recognised ability, particularly in football, it can play a significant role both socially and culturally in the lives of families.

To examine this complicated career journey, careership theory is ideally placed as it considers the contextual and structural elements of career decisions (Andersson & Barker-Ruchti, 2018). This provides a deeper understanding of how career decisions are made rather than simply viewing them as technically rational (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). The context of career decision making is used in careership theory to highlight the pragmatic nature of the process which it argues cannot be separated from the individual, their family and their culture.

Examining how individuals make choices needs to consider the social context (Coupland, 2015) rather than the idea of "autonomous choosers" (Hart, 2014a, p. 183) and careership theory provides the mechanism to analyse the social structure and how it shapes individual carer decisions.

4.2 The local football club and beyond - early career decisions

Accessing an occupational field such as professional football is subject to the football skills an individual possesses or what Newport (2016) refers to as career capital. To generate career capital in football, the journey begins with an introduction to the game through informal play and then a progression through the various layers or structures the game has developed. For Irish children these structures can include schoolboy football, the FAI ETP, a trial process with professional football clubs, underage international football, a scholar contract with a professional football club and finally a professional contract with the possibility of first team football. Although, the aforementioned is the linear career path most young footballers would like to follow to become a professional footballer, it is rarely achieved in this way (Roderick, 2006b; Botelho & Agergaard, 2011). Pursuing a career in professional football is unpredictable and it could be argued that children become caught up by the power and rigour of a complex environment that is culturally and socially constructed (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Pitchford et al., 2004). As a consequence, career opportunities to become a professional footballer, particularly for aspiring young Irish footballers may be limited due to a range of structural influences, some of which include the pressure to perform, competition from other players (at home and abroad) (Bourke, 2002) and the subjective decisions of scouts and coaches at every level of football (amateur and professional).

Similar to research completed by Bourke (2002), when the participants in this study were first introduced to the game of football in a formal manner, it was always with 'the local' team, that is, it was within close proximity to the family home and generally within walking distance. It can be easily argued that a parent's decision to bring their child to a local football team is culturally and socially motivated. For example, being involved with any local team, such as football, supports a child to socially integrate within their community (Coakley, 1998, 2006; Lalor, De Róiste & Devlin, 2007). A local team also provides an easier transition for a child to adapt to a new sport, as it will generally involve peers they know from school or the locality which, for parents can also provide a certain comfort. The age of the child and their ability

during this early introduction to football is also a significant factor. At a young age, it is unlikely that a child has exhibited any type of discernible talent as they are most likely playing for fun and enjoyment. Therefore, the standard of facilities and coaches within a local club will generally meet the needs of the child and satisfy parents in the early years (De Róiste & Dinneen, 2005). There is no doubt the local team serves a purpose for both child and parent as they are introduced to the basic fundamentals of the game such as skills and rules.

However, attitudes towards the local team can change as a child develops and shows potential as they get older. This was particularly evident for the majority of the participants in this study as there was a concerted effort to move from the local club they initially joined to one that offered better facilities, coaches and players (Bourke, 2003; Brown & Potrac, 2009; Andersson & Barker-Ruchti, 2018). The opportunity to be spotted by a scout who works for a professional football club abroad was also a very relevant factor. For Liam progression hinges on such a move:

> "Just to progress as a player I think you need to move on. If you keep playing at your local club with your friends and stuff, I don't think you are going to get anywhere really." (Liam – individual interview).

Liam's comment provides an insight into how football is socially structured, specifically in relation to how progress in this sport is achieved. A key factor in the orientation of the participants' habitus is their realisation that they are better than their peers in the local club. For Jack this also meant moving to a different club:

> "Under eights, under nines, it was becoming without being you know overstepping myself, it was a bit of a piss take like…I was scoring that many goals and the lads I was playing with, I was getting a bit annoyed at them… my Dad arranged a friendly against the DDSL winners and that's of course all of the Dublin league. You know you get the better teams in that really…and we got absolutely annihilated. I think it was five nil or something and that was a very good team and they must have liked me, so I said I would sign." (Jack – individual interview)

For Dylan, although he did not move club, his ability allowed him to play in an older age category which displays a constant demand for challenges and progression:

> "I think I was nine playing under tens, but I used to play with lads a lot older than me. Obviously, that's only a year but then…when I was ten playing under tens, I was playing under twelves as well. Then whenever I got into under twelve's I was playing under sixteens." (Dylan – individual interview)

It is not always the case that children who have ability in sport wish to progress to a higher level. Coakley and White (1992, p. 26) found that decisions to pursue a sport at a high level involved a "participation turning point". This turning point involved an awareness that an increased demand in time and commitment to a sport was required if they wanted to improve their skills. From the interviews completed in this study, the researcher found that the participants were willing to take this step including the necessary decisions to continue on the career path to become a professional footballer. This demonstrated that the requirement for increased commitment and dedication was within their 'horizons for action' (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Horizons for action are influenced by our position in a particular field, our interaction within it and the different opportunities it may provide or the lack thereof (Hodkinson, 2008). Participants took opportunities to move to superior clubs because they believed (based on their horizons for action) that this was the best decision for them to progress their career. Interestingly many of the participants in this research made a decision at a young age to move from their local club because this is what successful Irish footballers in the past had done. In this instance their horizons for action were guided by the success of others and ignored the likely reality that they themselves would not become professional footballers (Hodkinson, 2008). While this may seem illogical, it can possibly be explained using two different perspectives; firstly, the influence of the media and secondly, egocentrism in adolescence.

With regard to the media, Poli (2006, p. 407) suggests that "by only showing a few career paths of successful players, they contribute to a partial image of reality and thus function as a deforming prism". Therefore, when the media ignore the young footballers who do not develop a career as a professional footballer it feeds the illusion of an easy career path. From an individual perspective, Elkind (1967) suggests that as children develop, they are subject to different forms of egocentrism. In early adolescence, for example, this egocentrism manifests itself in a way that they believe other people are as obsessed with them as they are with themselves which is generally not the case (Elkind, 1967). However, the reality is that the context of an adolescent's social world plays a significant role in reinforcing this egocentrism.

For example, for the participants in this study, being selected as an underage international footballer and attending trials with professional football clubs can play a key role in reinforcing the belief that they will become a full-time professional footballer.

The participants' decision to move from their local club related to the clubs' limitations and the possibilities a new club could offer (Andersson & Barker-Ruchti, 2018). The attitude to local football was perfectly illustrated by Noah who described it as a 'Mickey Mouse' standard:

> "Because the quality isn't as good. It's just you know, I even know once I just go down and watch it like, you just know by watching. Because I have been in football all my life, seeing everything like you just know straight away…Like positioning, where to be, you know they just wouldn't know where to be, it would just be a bit Mickey Mouse I think [laugh]." (Noah – individual interview)

Noah was dismissive of local football in his area and contrasted this with this own deep understanding of football. It is accepted that moving to a new schoolboy club in Ireland may increase the chances of getting a trial with a professional football club, but it does not guarantee an individual will play first team football for them. Therefore, new career opportunities such as moving club may assist in the process of building rare and valuable career capital, but this process takes time, it is uncertain, and it necessitates hard work in the form of deliberate practice (Newport, 2016).

The decision to move from the local club must incorporate a parent, as it requires their consent and a significant commitment from them (Coakley, 1998; De Róiste & Dinneen, 2005; Lalor, De Róiste & Devlin, 2007; Gute et al., 2008; Harwood & Knight, 2009). Given that parents are usually keen to provide their child with every opportunity to develop (Coakley, 2006), when an opportunity to move to what is perceived to be a 'better' club arises, it can be difficult to refuse. Many key factors need to be considered before moving from the local football club such as the impact it will have on the individual child and their family. The process of moving club requires the child building new relationships as they attempt to prove themselves to new teammates and coaches. Having made the move to a new club at nine years of age, Jack explained that the transition was not easy but necessary:

> "It was different. It was a different scene you know, you are not with your local friends. You have to start all over again but I kind of felt like 'this is where I belong'… if I want to do anything [in football] …" (Jack – individual interview)

Moving club also requires a commitment and a period of transition on the part of the player's parents (Lalor, De Róiste & Devlin, 2007; Gute et al., 2008; Harwood & Knight, 2009). This involves readjusting to a new social group and if the new club is not close to the family home then careful management of the child's schoolwork, regard for other children in the family (if applicable), the parents' work schedules and transport arrangements to and from football need to be balanced. Mark provides an example of how he was prioritised over his siblings:

> "Well sometimes like if I had to go play football my dad would like, have to bring me instead of my sister to football or my brother, so I'd take preference to them sometimes." (Mark – focus group)

Coakley (2009) suggests that due to the moral obligation's parents hold in terms of assisting their children achieve their dreams, they make many significant personal sacrifices. It is also suggested that investing in their child, socialises parents in a way that they too feel part of their child's football development process (Pitchford, 2007b). It is also possible that the close relationship a talented child and parent may build due to their shared purpose can place additional pressure on other relationships within the family.

It is important to note that moving clubs may also be influenced by the structure of schoolboy football in Ireland. It is difficult for local clubs to retain their most talented players if they are constantly seeking a new challenge or to move up to a new level in terms of facilities and coaches (Fredricks et al., 2002). Schoolboy football in Ireland could be considered unfairly balanced towards leagues in highly populated areas. Dublin with three schoolboy leagues is a case in point, as it has a total population of over one million two hundred thousand people (CSO, 2017b). Dublin is surrounded by three counties, Wicklow, Kildare and Meath respectively and these three counties combined have a population of over five hundred thousand (CSO, 2017b) which is less than half of Dublin's total population. Therefore, when clubs in the three surrounding counties are producing talented footballers, the pressure to join one of the elite clubs in Dublin is extremely tempting and difficult to turn down. Similarly, for players who are playing with a Dublin club that is not considered elite, the offer to join a club

with better facilities and possibly an opportunity to progress their development and career as a professional footballer is tempting. The participants in this study strongly expressed the need to be with a club that would allow them to be constantly in the shop window providing the opportunity to be viewed by scouts. Scouts are considered to be the gatekeepers to the professional football world (Bourke, 2002; Calvin, 2014) and this is certainly reflected in comments made by Liam:

> "…I think you need to be in a league, a good league and that's when a lot of scouts started watching me." (Liam – individual interview)

Although, outside the scope of this study, it is worth mentioning that the best players moving from counties such as Wicklow, Kildare, Meath and from smaller clubs in Dublin maintains the status quo of the elite clubs in Dublin. It also makes it significantly easier for scouts to monitor the best players in Ireland as well as facilitating elite clubs to continue generating income in the form of training compensation. Research completed by Poli (2010) noted that there are many individuals involved in the movement of athletes and football in Ireland is certainly no different. The role of scouts is an integral factor in how Irish football is shaped at elite level in schoolboy football as their only aim is to satisfy the needs of the professional football club they are working for in the unrelenting search for the next star:

> The hunt to find those rare players who might bring success, money or both has bred intense competition among the clubs. They aren't satisfied just to find and develop their own players…bigger clubs [use] their power and prestige to lure players from the smaller ones. (Conn et al., 2003, p. 219)

The decision to move from the local club is arguably a player's first significant career decision and it is more than a young boy simply matching his football skills to a randomly selected club. It is based on pragmatic rationality rather than technical rationality (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997; Hodkinson, 2008). Technical rationality is limited as it only considers the cognitive and discursive characteristics of decision making and not the collective and embodied aspects of why we choose certain careers (Coupland, 2015). Technical rationality considers the career decision-making process as an individual activity whereas the decision to move club involves interaction with a number of sources such as coaches, scouts, friends and parents (Bourke, 2002). Yet although decisions may be informed

through a variety of sources, naturally, information about the club can only be partially known in advance (Bourke, 2003). Therefore, when the participants did move club, there was an element of the unknown when making this transition.

The embodiment of the decision-making process is particularly interesting and difficult to quantify with the participants explaining that it was a feeling they got about a particular club. This is another reason why careership theory considers career decisions as pragmatically rational because emotion is a key part of the decision-making process. In contrast, it is argued that technically rational decisions aim to be totally rational (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996). However, it is important to note that the positioning of the club in schoolboy football was a key consideration. For a child and parent to make the commitment to move, a club had to possess the power and potential to continue developing the player's career capital to progress to the next phase which was trials with professional football clubs.

4.3 Football career development in Ireland – setting the context

Schoolboy football in the Republic of Ireland is administered by the SFAI and there are currently thirty-two schoolboy leagues in existence. One of these includes the DDSL which was formed in nineteen forty-three and is the most high-profile league for underage football in Ireland in the twenty-first century. To contextualise the strength of the DDSL, their representative squad have won the SFAI's Kennedy Cup (under 14 national competition which consists of all thirty-two schoolboy leagues across Ireland) thirty-two times since it commenced in nineteen seventy-six (SFAI, 2018). In addition to this, Maher (2015) notes that six clubs in the DDSL, namely Home Farm, Belvedere, Cherry Orchard, St Kevin's Boys, St Joseph's Boys, and Stella Maris have been responsible for supplying fifty players to the Republic of Ireland senior team over the last two decades. For these clubs, being seen to produce senior international players heightens their status in Irish football. They are what Bourke (2002) refers to as Irish feeder clubs as they play a key role in facilitating the football migration process of young talented Irish footballers to the UK. Furthermore, by representing their country at senior level, these players have reached the pinnacle of football and embody cultural symbols for the next generation of young players (Chung, 2003; Christensen & Sørensen, 2009; Coakley, 2009).

Young players often map the career pathway of successful footballers that have gone before them in an attempt to mirror them and to achieve their own goal of becoming a professional footballer and senior international with Ireland (Kelly, 2014). This generally requires talented footballers moving from their local schoolboy club, to clubs who play in high profile leagues like the DDSL. Maher (2015) interviewed senior international and Premier League player Stephen Ward who outlined the key reasons he moved from his local club to a club in the DDSL:

> "Where I grew up in Portmarnock, I played with my friends on the local team but there was interest from the likes of Home Farm, Belvedere, and St Kevin's Boys, and it was really a no-brainer for me to join one of them…[y]ou just had to look at some of the guys who previously played for them and the amount of guys who got trials at English teams to know that it was somewhere to be if you wanted to make it as a professional footballer." (ibid, para. 10)

Curran and Kelly (2018) found that Home Farm football club provided the greatest number of Irish players who migrated to English football between 1945 and 2010. There is no doubt the status of the DDSL is heightened by the number of its players who receive offers to go on trials to professional football clubs. It is interesting to note that this very point was made by the participants in this study:

> "I played in the DDSL and just, I think it's a really good league. Some of the teams in it are really good and I see the amount of players that go away to England in the DDSL as well is really good." (Liam – individual interview)

> "…the highest league you can play in and I just think the scouts come and watch them games mostly. You are playing against all the best players and the best teams in Ireland, so I just think you need to be playing at the highest level." (Noah – individual interview)

> "So, it's the big local kind of derby's [in the DDSL] that all the scouts go to and they look at you and if you do well in them you know you will get spotted." (Jack – individual interview)

> "My local club isn't really a great club like it's not a massive club like St Kevin's Boys. Like all the best players would go to St Kevin's Boys or Cherry Orchard or Home Farm like that's where the scouts go." (Hugh – individual interview)

Maher (2015, para 17) also interviewed a football scout who explained that seventy to eighty percent of his focus is on the six main DDSL clubs because "if you want the best, you have to shop at the best place". It could be suggested that this narrow focus illuminates "an inadequately regulated environment that invites greed and expedience" (Calvin, 2017, p. 49). However, playing for one of the elite teams in the DDSL is a symbol of your talent as a schoolboy. Players are drawn to it as it provides the opportunity to put their skills on display in a league, which is considered to be the best shop window in Ireland even more so than the League of Ireland.

The standard of players in the DDSL was a point continuously made by many of the participants. Recognising their own ability as a footballer from a young age, the decision to move from their local club was to them an important transition. It was an important transition because they felt they had outgrown their local club, and this is identified in careership theory as an evolutionary routine and moving club as a self-initiated turning point (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). To highlight the standard of football in the DDSL, Liam who was with a professional football club at the time of the individual interview noted that some of the teams he currently played against were similar to those in the DDSL. Liam confirmed that from a very young age he knew he was a good player and consequently felt he had to move to the DDSL to progress his career which ultimately took place at the age of twelve. However, it is not possible to simply register with one of the elite clubs in the DDSL. A couple of options are available, the first of which involves parents sending their child on a trial which in some of the elite clubs starts as young as eight years of age. An invitation to join an elite DDSL club can also be offered to a player and this is how a number of the participants ended up moving from their local clubs.

Due to the competitiveness of the DDSL, elite clubs are constantly recruiting players from local clubs in Dublin and the surrounding counties. This has two effects; it depletes local clubs of players who are technically gifted for their age and secondly it presents opportunities to these players to progress their development (Bourke, 2003). Careership theory helps us to understand the career decision to move clubs at a young age suggesting that an individual's horizons for

action is influenced by their position in a field which is subject to the capital (football skills) they possess (Hodkinson, 2008). This demonstrates that from an early age the participants horizons for action recognised the limitations of the field they were in (the local football club) to take advantage of their football ability to construct the career capital required to move to the next level (Bourke, 2002; Coupland, 2015).

Similar to research completed by Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000), geographic location was a key factor in career decision-making. For example, for participants such as Dylan and Ian their remote locations restricted the possibility of moving from their local club even though they knew they had career capital to do so. However, for many of the other participants when an opportunity presented itself the chance was taken to move club. This is demonstrated in examples provided by Hugh and Ryan:

- Hugh: I knew I could take it to the next level and then Frank Byrne the manager of Ashwood Celtic [DDSL club] at the time, he only lives up around the corner, he came and he talked to my Mam and Dad and then that was really it like he convinced them that it was a great club like and it was the pathway to making it.
- Interviewer: Ok, and the pathway? What do you mean by that?
- Hugh: Like the coaches, the training, just the scouts coming to the games and they had the connection with [a Premier League club] and everything like that like so... (Hugh – individual interview)

It is interesting to find that the circumstances of Ryan's move to the DDSL were almost identical to Hugh's as they both needed a new challenge:

- Ryan: I wanted a challenge, so I went to Kilburn Celtic [DDSL club] at like under fifteens I think.
- Interviewer: So, what do you mean by you wanted a challenge?
- Ryan: Like it was just proper easy like. I was strolling through games and I think Kilburn Celtic wanted me as well so... (Ryan – individual interview)

Ryan however was not recruited through his local club; in fact, this was done as a result of him playing in a school's match for his secondary school. This highlights the workings of the domestic scouting network and the vast spread of the elite DDSL clubs' recruitment process,

evidence that scouting is not simply limited to schoolboy club games. Following this match, the DDSL club went to meet Ryan's parents and he signed for the club. However, it is interesting to note that Ryan was intimidated by the 'step-up' in standard to the DDSL from the Dublin league he played in. This highlights the point made previously that individuals are using the DDSL to measure their own ability against their peers':

> "I used to go watching like if Joey's were playing Kevin's I would go up and watch it and watch all the centre backs and all that and I just didn't think I was better than them." (Ryan – individual interview)

Mark also refers to being watched by one of the bigger DDSL clubs whilst playing for his local club. Many of the participants acknowledged that they knew they were being watched by other clubs which exemplifies a type of panoptic surveillance (which will be explored further in chapter five) over their performances as they knew they were constantly being scrutinised:

> "I'd say like I was a forty goal a season striker and… St. Michael's [DDSL club] were definitely watching and stuff and…if you are any good you will be picked up by somebody." (Mark – individual interview)

Interestingly, Mark's move to one of the six elite DDSL clubs mentioned previously, was initiated by the same friend of his father who had originally introduced him to football through a local club.The participants' transition from their local club highlights how an individual's habitus changes over time and this may be the first step in a shift towards viewing football as a career opportunity rather than simply a game. This point is demonstrated through the comparison of two of the participants in this study in sections 4.3.1 and 4.3.2, namely, Aiden and James. Aiden and James are being used for comparative purposes because they are from the same town, they are the same age and they played underage international football together (which also meant they were in the same focus group for this research). A similar approach was taken by Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson (1996) and Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000) who also used individuals to compare and present their data on career decision making and transitions. Although Aiden and James played with different local clubs, at the time of the focus group, they appeared to be on the same career trajectory in the pursuit to become a professional footballer.

Using the focus group and individual interviews, Aiden and James's stories highlight the different pathways they decided to take and the role of chance or what careership theory refers to as the unpredictability of occupational career choice (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997; Ball, Maguire & Macrae, 2000). In the quest to become a professional footballer, it is interesting to note that James remained with the local club he joined as a four-year-old until he turned sixteen. The key difference between both individuals' career decisions was Aiden's decision to move to one of the top six elite clubs in the DDSL. For the purposes of analysis, careership theory identifies three types of turning points; structural (determined by external structures of institutions), self-initiated (individual responds to factors in their life) and forced (caused by external events or actions of others) (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997).

4.3.1 Choices and Consequences – Aiden

During the focus group, Aiden who was fifteen at the time was unequivocal in his view that a move to the DDSL was necessary to participate in what he considered to be a "better class of football". He also stated:

> "Well like, it kinda keeps you at your best really. Like if you're playing now in a bad league you're just gonna look good but you're probably not improving at all. [In the DDSL] you're improving against better players." (Aiden – focus group)

Over two years later in his individual interview, Aiden was very forthright concerning the reason he decided to move to a schoolboy club in the DDSL. He explained, that at the time, he considered the move as the necessary step to get recognised by a scout to progress his career in football. This is an example of a self-initiated turning point which involves individuals responding to factors in their life that are presented to them within the 'field' or environment they inhabit (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Aiden acknowledged that the decision to move clubs was his own, in consultation with his father (who had no formal involvement with association football), which demonstrates an attempt to take control of the direction of his career. Aiden's decision to move club appears to have been pragmatically rational, in that it was informed by the structural field, as well as "partly governed by emotions and embedded in [the] habitus" (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson,

1996, p. 122). Aiden's decision, was bounded by the choices available at a particular point in time (Coupland, 2015) based on his knowledge of the DDSL and how 'he felt':

> "It was my choice to go to Dublin because I felt that if I was going to get anywhere in my career, I felt I had to be at a big club in a big league playing with better players. Because all the scout's kind of just stay around Dublin…I know there are a few that spread out throughout the country, but they are mostly just looking at the DDSL" (Aiden – individual interview)

It is important to note that moving schoolboy club, particularly to one of the elite DDSL teams, could not simply happen because Aiden wanted it to. Skills do not always guarantee transition to the next stage of what is perceived to be an ideal career pathway. This supports the argument that career decisions are pragmatically rational as career progression is not linear and is dependent on chance, interaction with others and opportunities within the field (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997; Hodkinson, 2008). This point was illustrated during the individual interview with Aiden explaining that the move to Dublin did not work out as he had thought:

> "When I first moved to Dublin, I thought I had to be in Dublin to be playing at a good standard so that I would be seen. But now looking back on it, I probably would have been the same if I had of stayed down here. I would have stood out more..." (Aiden – individual interview)

This is an interesting finding because it demonstrates that embodied capital, in the form of skills and abilities, needs the precise environment to nurture and appreciate it. This strengthens the argument espoused in careership theory that chance or serendipity (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997) plays a significant role in career progression. Bourdieu also explains that "the ongoing dialectic of subjective hopes and objective chances, which is at work throughout the social world, can yield a variety of outcomes ranging for perfect mutual fit…to radical disjunction…" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 130). Later, Aiden reflected on the reality of being in the right place at the right time (Stevenson, 2001):

> "You could be playing in the middle of nowhere just through your local team and somehow some scout is just sitting there. You play well, and you get over and straight away you are signed. Or you could be playing up in Dublin. The best players, you are

not playing that particularly well and scouts don't really, you don't really stand out and you don't really get that much interest." (Aiden – individual interview)

In retrospect, Aiden's move to Dublin was not a perfect fit, which suggests that personal aspirations are not always matched by the opportunities available. It is interesting to examine the change in Aiden's opinion from the focus group to the individual interview. In the focus group he stated that 'looking good in a bad league' was not a good enough reason to stay in such a league. However, with hindsight, he realised that playing in the DDSL may have increased the number of scouts looking at the matches he played in, but with so many good players on view, it was in fact hard to stand out from the crowd, an opportunity his old league may have provided. This reinforces the point made previously that currently the football market is saturated with children who uniformly possess the same career capital. As a consequence, with the talent base at schoolboy level increasing (in Ireland and globally), it has created a 'bottleneck effect' in career development in this field (Schmidt & Nilsson, 2006).

Aiden's story confirms that possessing the relevant capital is only one element of a complex process and the actions of others such as coaches and scouts within a specified field, particularly their decisions are also crucial (Bourke, 2002). Aiden's body language and tone at points during the interview were of disappointment, regret and almost a sense of loss or what Schlossberg (1981) refers to as a non-event. It was very obvious that Aiden was finding the fact that he was not in England very hard to deal with as he was visibly upset:

"…when we were under fifteens [with the international team] like most, nearly all those players are in England now. I feel like I have been left out. I have missed the boat kind of you know but, in my head, I know I haven't like. I am still seventeen but that's the way you are made to feel with everyone in England." (Aiden – individual interview)

Finally, Aiden inadvertently referred to training compensation which seems to have stalled a deal for him to move to a professional football club in England:

"…when I was playing for Albion [local club], I probably got more trials then than I did when I moved up to Dublin…because the Dublin clubs are only looking for money and there is always hassle with them. Every two minutes there is hassle with Dublin

clubs, so I reckon if I had of stayed down here I would have been just, I reckon I might have got a bit more." (Aiden – individual interview)

This last statement highlights the complex nature of football or what Dunning (2001) refers to as the football figuration. Issues such as training compensation indicate that a move to a professional football club abroad is not simply based on performances on the pitch; interactions off the field of play are also of critical importance (O'Hara, 2015). Aiden also mentioned that he got more trials with professional football clubs when he was with his 'local team'. On reflection, he argues that this was because he stood out more due to a reduced level of quality players in what he had considered an inferior league.

It is important to note that Aiden should not have been allowed to register with the Dublin club in the first instance as he did not satisfy the rules of the SFAI which restrict players from playing with a club if it was more than forty-nine kilometres away from their home. This rule was introduced to prevent young players travelling large distances for the purposes of playing football and to stop the 'bigger' leagues and elite clubs poaching players from local clubs. Aiden's home was over one hundred kilometres away from the club in the DDSL, but this was never raised as an issue as it is an accepted practice for children to travel long distances to play in the DDSL. This meant his father invested a considerable amount of time and money transporting him to matches and training. The travelling had an impact on Aiden's well-being, particularly going to school the following morning:

"… two nights of your week was completely gone. It was three hours travelling nearly. So, you get back about 11 o'clock on those two nights. You would be tired the next morning going into school." (Aiden – individual interview)

Aiden's decision to move from his local club and make a two-hundred-kilometre round trip each time he went to training or to a match was solely based on the chance of being spotted by a scout from a professional football club. Since Aiden's interview, a new rule has been introduced by the FAI for players who are sixteen years of age or under, increasing the distance from their club to their usual place of residence from forty-nine kilometres to eighty kilometres (FAI, 2018a).

Interestingly, players who are sixteen years of age or under are exempt from the eighty-kilometre rule if they are participating in FAI underage national league competitions (ibid). This is to facilitate the underage national leagues introduced by the FAI at under seventeen level in 2015, under fifteen level in 2017, with plans to introduce an under thirteens national league in 2019. The specific FAI Rule (2.6 in Part C, 'Playing the Game') that deals with the registration of under sixteen players highlights the power of institutions such as the FAI to alter the rules of the field. Indeed, the rule itself is a contradiction because on one level it protects children by preventing them from travelling more than eighty kilometres to join a football club. On the other hand, it disregards this logic by allowing players to exceed the eighty-kilometre rule to suit the needs of the FAI to develop an underage national league structure.

4.3.2 Choices and Consequences – James

At the time of the individual interview, James was contracted to a professional football club in the UK but was not initially 'spotted' by them whilst playing for his local club. This point is important because it is simply impossible for scouts from professional football clubs to go to every schoolboy game in Ireland. Therefore, they focus their schedules on specific fixtures in schoolboy leagues in big cities, county matches or underage schoolboy competitions. This maximises the number of players they can see in order to report their findings to the professional football club they work for. It is not surprising then that schoolboy leagues such as the DDSL are a key focus for scouts as they provide a high concentration of talented players in a relatively small geographic area (Kelly, 2014). This is important because many of the other schoolboy leagues have a reduced number of high-quality players spread across a greater geographic area and this was the position James found himself in.

James's participation with his local club did provide him with an opportunity to play for his county/league representative team. Each of the thirty-two schoolboy leagues in Ireland has a county/league representative team at underage level. The best players are selected from clubs who participate in each of their respective leagues at specific age categories. Football matches are then played against other representative teams providing an opportunity to play against the best players at their age category as well as the opportunity to get recognised by professional scouts. It is important to distinguish between the three platforms scouts use to identify young talented footballers. Leagues in big cities such as the DDSL provide access to players on a weekly basis. However, county matches and underage competitions are once off events which

occur intermittently throughout the year. Therefore, if a talented player does not move to a high-profile league, they are limiting their chances of getting recognised by a scout. James confirmed that he was initially identified by a scout from a professional football club whilst playing for his county team. Referring to the limited amount of county games, James believed the role of serendipity was significant (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997), making him feel 'lucky' to have been noticed by the professional football club he signed for:

> "I think I was kind of lucky really…the scouts saw me playing for [the county team] and… [a scout] came down to watch like one or two club games…then I was brought over [for trials], and it just went from there then so." (James – individual interview)

When we consider career decision-making, particularly within the sporting environment, serendipity, which is also referred to as chance, happenstance or synchronicity plays a pivotal role (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Chance is multifactorial and strongly influenced by the field, the career capital we possess within this field and our interaction with others and the decisions they make (ibid). This illustrates that although career capital in the football world is necessary, on its own, it is simply not enough. Career decisions also help to ensure being in the right place at the right time when an opportunity is presented.

The process of James being offered a professional contract involved his performance on a particular day, his wellbeing (both physical and mental), external factors such as the weather, the match venue, other players who were involved in the game and the subjective opinion of a scout. It may seem obvious, but the decision of the scout to attend a county match in which James took part and played well in, were all contributing factors to his progression to professional football. This is consistent with research completed by Bright, Pryor and Harpham (2005, p. 573) who found that "chance events were an important factor in career decision making" and James is quite clear when asked if there is an element of luck in football:

> "Definitely, definitely like because on another day maybe [the scout] mightn't have been at that county match and I wouldn't be like where I am today, so I definitely think there is luck involved." (James – individual interview)

Furthermore, James references the decision he made to remain with his local club rather than transferring to a club in Dublin as significant:

> "I think I was lucky enough that everything kind of came at the right time really. Like, I suppose that time when I chose not to go to Dublin from Grange FC [local club] a couple of lads went off the team and then like the county team had less players..." (James – individual interview)

James's decision not to move to Dublin was in hindsight, a critical self-initiated turning point which propelled his career trajectory in line with his individual career preference, that is, to become a professional footballer. Although from a transitional perspective this is a non-event (Schlossberg, 1981), it is still significant and using careership theory we can identify this as a confirmatory routine as it reinforces a career decision already made. James's decision not to move club highlights how career pathways do not always transpire simply because the necessary qualifications or experience are met, but as careership theory suggests, there must be an emphasis on the unpredictability of choice and chance (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997; Ball, Maguire & Macrae, 2000; Allin & Humberstone, 2006; Hodkinson, 2008).

Following his offer of a trial with a professional football club, James also explained that he felt a sense of loyalty to his local club which influenced his decision to stay with them rather than move to a DDSL club:

> "Because I had interest from [a professional football club] obviously after the Kennedy Cup, I just figured like I was on trial [with them] and they asked me back and I just said, 'well I got scouted when I was playing for my club, so I don't see how I could leave like'." (James – individual interview)

As already discussed, James would not have got a trial solely based on his participation with his local club as scouts do not generally attend schoolboy games in the league he played in. Therefore, if he had not received the offer of a trial (through his participation on the county team), his loyalty to the local club may have been tested as James and his father had carefully considered if he should move. The following extract highlights how decisions in football involve consultation with many "actors" and "networks" (Poli, 2010, p. 494):

> "…it was after the Kennedy Cup and me and my Dad were debating. We asked loads of people like 'what should we do and what do you think we should do and things like

that', and I was going to go to Dublin to play for St. Michael's [DDSL club], but I decided to stay." (James – individual interview)

Although James and Aiden ended up following different career paths, it is important to note the similarities between them at a specific point in their career development as they both considered moving from their local schoolboy club. However, the reason James did not move to a club in Dublin like Aiden was not because he was any less bounded in this career decisions. Rather, it can be explained by the opportunity that presented itself due to his involvement with a representative team. Being spotted by a scout does not diminish the fact that James was at a crossroads in his career and it was only this serendipitous opportunity that provided an alternative choice (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996). It may be possible that financial considerations also contributed to James and his parent's decision not to move to a Dublin club.

4.4 Summary

It is obvious that a key element in the career decision-making process is our interaction with others, of which the family play a significant part (Giddens, 1997; Ball, Maguire & Macrae, 2000). It is often suggested that as children transition into adolescence, they begin to disengage from family life as they embark on the formation of their own individual identity (De Róiste & Dinneen, 2005; Lalor, De Róiste & Devlin, 2007). However, similar to research completed by Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000) who also examined career choice and transitions, the participants in this research continued to look to their parents for support into adolescence acknowledging that they were critical in progressing their career to become a professional footballer. This is consistent with research on career development that identified parents as more influential than peers (Penick & Jepsen, 1992; Whiston & Keller, 2004). Significantly, the findings in this research are in stark contrast to findings identified by Bourke (2002, p. 380) who found little evidence "to support the claim that parents are a leading influence on the career choice of their offspring".

The findings in this research identified two key points; firstly, family support reciprocated a strong sense of obligation to parents and secondly, football played a substantial role in maintaining the child-parent relationship during adolescence which is perceived to be a difficult transitional period. Navigating the world of football strengthened the ties between the participants and their parents as they were presented with choices that required careful

consideration. The irony of course is that the close bond formed between the parent and child during the career development process may make the transition to a professional football club even more difficult.

Choice was also examined in this chapter and although it is generally viewed as positive, it may contribute to increased confusion regarding which career path to take (Lalor, De Róiste & Devlin, 2007). This was illustrated by the complex nature of the decisions Aiden and James had to make and the unpredictable career path these decisions presented. The commonality between Aiden and James was their embodied disposition to pursue their passion (Hodkinson, 2008; Coupland, 2015). Both Aiden and James were passionate about football and saw it as a pertinent career path. Yet the football career path is strongly influenced by chance and interaction with key decision makers such as scouts which children and their families have to carefully navigate. The decision-making process begins at an early age in the football world (Bourke, 2002) and the first important decision to make is whether they should remain with or move from the local club. The next phase of the career development pathway for young Irish footballer's concerns involvement in underage competitions and participation in trials with professional football clubs.

Chapter 5 – Playing the Fields

5.0 Introduction

A key principle on which careership theory is founded, concerns the dynamic and complex nature of career choice and the decision-making process associated with it. This process takes place in social environments or fields that are shaped by interaction with others and the unequal distribution of power this espouses (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997; Holroyd, 2002; Hodkinson, 2008). This is particularly evident in the football environment in Ireland as underage international footballers attempt to negotiate their own careers to become professional footballers. This requires engagement within the structure of Irish football such as underage schoolboy competitions in their attempt to get a trial with a professional football club in the UK. This chapter will present the analysis on the second theme in this study which examined how Irish underage international footballers interact with the football environment to advance their career progression. This will be presented in line with the four sub themes which emerged: the function of underage cup competitions, building up to the professional trial, football trials - entering a new field and trials and tribulations.

Examining football as socially constructed allows it to be analysed as a component of the social world which is "created by people as they interact with one another under the social, political, and economic conditions that exist in their society" (Coakley, 2009, p. 27). Therefore, a key question in this chapter will focus on how children and their parents interact with the social, political and economic structures of football. Additionally, this chapter will also examine the influence these structures have on the choices, decisions and the experiences of children in their quest to become a professional footballer. Although careership theory provides for a power imbalance in the occupational field, to enhance this theory, Foucault's work on power is particularly relevant. Foucault's views on power, especially how it is used when hidden from view makes a useful contribution to understanding the structure of schoolboy football in Ireland.

The football environment at schoolboy level in Ireland clearly serves as a modern-day panopticon and underage cup competitions are an excellent example of this. Notwithstanding the fact that young footballers seek affirmation of their footballing ability from scouts, underage cup competitions are key events in the schoolboy calendar. They accentuate and

preserve a power imbalance in favour of scouts which will be examined in more detail in this chapter. This is important because the scout plays a key role in the process of offering professional football trials to young Irish footballers and the experiences of the participants during this process provide an insight into this aspect of the professional football world from their perspective.

5.1 Underage cup competitions

Underage cup competitions are culturally embedded for different age groups in schoolboy football in Ireland, some of which include the Foyle cup (played in Derry in July: under nine to under nineteen level), the Galway cup (played in Co. Galway in August: under twelve to under seventeen level) and the Hibernia trophy (played in Co. Dublin in August: under fifteen level only). Being selected to participate in one of these competitions is recognition of a child's ability at a specific point in time. This is because they are representing either their club, county or country in high profile competitions that only display the best players in specific age categories. Official European competitions at international level only commence at under seventeen level, so prior to this, underage cup competitions in Ireland fill this void as marquee events in the schoolboy football calendar. Competition organisers charge teams an admission fee and they travel from various parts of the world to participate in these events. Underage cup competitions are sponsored by local and international businesses and are heavily attended by scouts from professional football clubs as it is an excellent opportunity to survey the talent that is on offer at specific age grades.

The most prestigious schoolboy competition in Ireland is arguably the Kennedy Cup which commenced in nineteen seventy-six. Unlike the other competitions referenced above, it is an officially recognised national cup competition administered by the SFAI, an affiliate body of the FAI. The thirty-two schoolboy leagues affiliated to the SFAI participate in the four-day event which commences in June at the end of the under fourteen club competitive year. The format of the competition starts with eight groups of four and as the event progresses it becomes a knockout tournament. This competition is a focal point in the calendar year for scouts. What it offers young children was succinctly summarised by Jack:

> "It was a lot of hype and that's a big deal like when you are thirteen or fourteen and someone is telling you there is going to be loads of scouts there and stuff and you are

> thinking 'if I'm on the team I might get a few trials' or you know 'how cool would it be to go over to,' you know immediately you start thinking 'oh Chelsea' and stuff like that but it's not really like that." (Jack – individual interview)

The Kennedy Cup coincides with two important stages in the embryonic development of a career as a professional footballer. Firstly, the competition applies to under fourteen county/league representative teams and fourteen is the age Irish players are officially permitted to go on trials to professional football clubs (FAI Scouting Regulations, 2011). Using careership theory, this can be identified in the Irish football environment as a key structural turning point. Therefore, the Kennedy Cup provides a vehicle to display players' football development on a national stage (Kelly, 2014). Secondly, it also coincides with the specialisation stage (thirteen – fifteen years old) identified by Côté (1999) in his model of sports participation. In this stage, young athletes concentrate their attention on developing their ability in specific sports, in this case football. Therefore, the Kennedy Cup is seen as a milestone event in the football calendar that provides the opportunity to transition from amateur schoolboy football to trials with professional football clubs. As the participants explained, football gets serious and competitive at this age:

> "Football really gets serious around then. I think like it doesn't need to get that serious but for whatever reason it does. It becomes really competitive and there is you know the emerging talent comes into it. There is the DDSL team. There is the Kennedy Cup is around that age and things and you find yourself focusing on those things…" (Jack – individual interview)

> "Because you just heard about all these scouts giving these players trials and just everyone wanting to play in the Kennedy Cup because it was the biggest tournament in Irish football at that time like." (Aiden – individual interview)

Using Bourdieu's concept of field allows us to conceptualise the importance of the Kennedy Cup competition in the participants' social world at this specific point in time. Socially constructed fields or instruments of culture, such as sport, shape our habitus and our position in the field is influenced by the amount of capital we possess (Hodkinson, 2008). Bourdieu defines capital as economic, social, cultural or symbolic (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997; Hart, 2012) noting that it "does not exist and function except in

relation to a field" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 101). As previously mentioned, another important form of capital introduced by Newport (2016) is career capital which are rare and valuable skills offered in return for a career that is rare and valuable.

The power of the Kennedy Cup tournament is pervasive and attracts the focus of thousands of individuals for a period of time in their lives: the children who participate in the competition, their families, coaches (domestic and international), scouts, agents, spectators, the FAI and the media. Therefore, being selected to play in the Kennedy Cup creates pressure as the players' skills are on public display and there is an expectation to play well in such a prestigious competition. One might refer to this as panoptic pressure because the participants' performances are being monitored without actually knowing who is watching. This was particularly evident for the DDSL players in this study because they are generally favourites to win the competition every year. In the focus group, Max confirmed that there was pressure to perform at the Kennedy Cup because they were representing the DDSL and this point was also noted by other DDSL players, namely Liam and Noah which can be seen from the comments in their individual interviews:

> "There is a lot of people watching you. It's a lot of nerves like. A lot of people expect Dublin to win. So, there is a lot of pressure on us and the coaches…" (Liam – individual interview)

- Noah: That was a bit of pressure actually because we were sort of the favourites to win it so that was a big thing. Obviously, we did win it but like it was hard, it was hard. Actually, Liam scored the winner in the final so.
- Interviewer: …where was the pressure coming from?
- Noah: The whole country I think because we were expected to win because we have all of the best players. (Noah – individual interview)

Noah's comments reinforce the idea that there is a concentration of talented players in the DDSL. The expectation to win the Kennedy Cup influenced his experience of the competition and often manifested itself in open rivalry with opposition players:

> "Like even when you are playing against the teams, they would just be so much more up for it…there would be bigger crowds at our games because they want to see us get

> beaten…[the players] would leave the boot in a bit [and say] 'You fucking cunt I am going to break your legs' and all so…obviously it was a bit hard because they are going out to just kill you sort of but because we had the better players and stuff we were ok I think." (Noah – individual interview)

This type of intimidation was not unique to the Kennedy Cup with many of the participants highlighting verbal and physical threats in their respective leagues because they were underage international players. However, DDSL players may be more likely targets of this type of threatening behaviour in the Kennedy Cup due to their dominance in the competition since its inception. Another reason, although not explicitly stated is the belief that the DDSL unfairly poach players from other schoolboy leagues. This strengthens the DDSL's representative team whilst stripping other league teams of their best players.

Alex who was the captain of his league's representative team in the Kennedy Cup experienced similar pressure to Noah. This pressure was again related to an expectation to win the tournament as he played with one of the bigger leagues outside of Dublin and he was also receiving considerable attention from scouts as a talented player:

> "I was kind of told before I was going down there that there's a few [professional] clubs going to be looking at me down there [at the Kennedy Cup], so I was kind of under a bit of pressure as well, but I done well...I had loads of clubs after that like that's where I kind of started off." (Alex – individual interview)

Although the Kennedy Cup provided opportunities for Alex to progress his career, he and the other participants who competed in the Kennedy Cup, described the competition as a melting pot of pressure and tension rather than a supportive environment facilitating creativity and expression. The Kennedy Cup exacerbates the notion of winning at all costs as coaches select players who are physically bigger rather than technically better (Finnegan et al., 2017). It is suggested that "in the youth development phase, twelve to sixteen, one of the major challenges involves the coach's ego starting to kick in" (Calvin, 2017, p. 33). This point is supported by Brackenridge et al. (2004, p. 43) who note that the world of football can be closed and secretive "where managers and coaches were anxious about their positions and about pressure for their teams to perform on the pitch".

The participants' change in attitude towards the Kennedy Cup with the passage of time was also particularly interesting. We can see this by comparing the comments of the focus group and the individual interview (three years apart) of Hugh:

> "…you know there's going to be loads of scouts there, so you have to play well, it's like the really first big thing you play in to get noticed so you feel, you feel oh I have to play well." (Hugh – focus group 2012)

> "There was a lot of hype about the Kennedy Cup like really 'aw you have to do well in the Kennedy Cup' and all of this like. All the scouts are there and everything, but it wasn't anything special really." (Hugh – individual interview 2015)

Dylan's attitude also changed towards the Kennedy Cup. Dylan felt overwhelmed by the pressure of scouts watching him the first time he participated in this competition. However, the second time he was more measured in his approach and gave little or no attention to who was watching. Although from an objective perspective, Dylan's position may not have changed as he was still a young footballer participating in the Kennedy Cup, subjectively, his perception of his position in the field had changed. Although he may not have felt he had more power to influence the field, this can be viewed as a transition because it is a change of assumption about himself (Schlossberg, 1981). Careership theory is particularly useful in helping to understand how individuals change their subjective beliefs, ideas and preferences through Bourdieu's concept of habitus. Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) suggest that our habitus is developed through schemata which are conceptual structures amassed over time to help understand our experiences. Therefore, Dylan's approach to his second Kennedy Cup is an excellent example of how previous experiences play an integral role in modifying subsequent perceptions.

5.2 Building up to the professional football trial

Up to this point in the construction of their football career, the participants had experienced a gradual increase in their career capital and it was evident that this necessitated new challenges to continue their development in different environments, either with a county team, a new club, the FAI ETP or all three. This is significant because it advocates the concept of career construction in different environments as opposed to career linearity, a key point espoused in careership theory (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). The

football trial with a professional football club was the next key event for the participants as it facilitated the transition or bridge, from the amateur schoolboy game to the professional football world.

For the participants in this research, it was evident that trials were held in very high regard, as is the case in Irish schoolboy football generally. A trial consists of two turning points; structural (turning fourteen years of age) and self-initiated (deciding to go on a trial if offered) but could also include a forced turning point if a young footballer feels under pressure to accept the trial offered by a scout (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). It could also be a number of routines such as confirmatory because it reinforces the career decisions that the participants had made up to this point (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). This highlights the subjectivity of the career decision-making process because although it confirms to the individual that the decision's they made were the right ones, each of the participants made different decisions that simply led to the same outcome, that is, a trial with a professional football club. However, trials could also be viewed as contradictory routines where the experience is not adequate or appropriate and undermines previous decisions made.

A trial with a professional football club could be viewed as an example of a transitional career field. For the purposes of this research a transitional career field will be conceptualised as; an event that is recognised objectively as a meaningful 'opportunity' to build career capital to improve an individual's chance of reaching their career destination, whilst having a multi-layered subjective interpretation. For example, a trial could be viewed as an opportunity to move closer to becoming a professional footballer. However, although this opportunity was desired by all of the participants in this research, their experiences had different meaning for them depending on their individual backgrounds, habitus and horizons for action. A trial as a transitional career field, presents individuals with an opportunity to exhibit their transferrable career capital that can be assessed and possibly used by a professional football club. This is what Coupland (2015, p. 114) refers to as "the development of future capital" and provides a broader interpretation of the specific events individuals encounter as they attempt to fulfil their career aspirations. Viewing trials as a transitional career field, supports careership theory in that it emphasises the fluidity of career progression, moving interchangeably from one transitional career field to another instead of viewing career progression as linear. Building career capital was evident in a comment made by Mark:

> "…in youth football [in Ireland] everyone knows that there's scouts watching every game and then, it's like you're playing for yourself almost. Then once you hear of other people going for trials, it's kind of like you start trying harder and like suddenly, winning leagues isn't the aim, going on trials is the aim. That's kind of like your basis for how good you are is how many trials you have been on." (Mark – individual interview).

In this example, Mark discusses playing for himself rather than the team which is a reflection of how attitudes can change when a sport like football is seen as a career rather than a game (Parker, 1996; Roderick, 2006a; Platts, 2012). Similarly, Parker (1996, p. 111) identified in his research that the "[e]xperiences of schoolboy football…had taught trainees that, in reality, being a good 'team player' and showing consideration for the welfare of others were relatively unprofitable ventures in terms of occupational success". Mark's quote signifies that he is constructing his own personal career capital to make the transition to the next stage of his career.

Football trials provide underage footballers with the chance to break free from their existing life using what is commonly referred to as an opportunity to move to the next level in their career (Elliott, 2016). However, the absence of a trial or what Schlossberg (1981) refers to as a non-event creates a vacuum and a questioning of their potential to become a professional footballer and in extreme circumstances who they see themselves as. It is widely accepted that the transition to a professional football club is highly unlikely at a young age without having attended a trial. Players are acutely aware of this, which heightens the pressure to perform for scouts. That said, failing to succeed in the trial process does not rule out a possible career in professional football. There are other options such as the League of Ireland (at underage and senior level). However, the findings of this research suggest that such alternatives are usually absent from young Irish players' horizons for action.

Richardson et al. (2012, p. 1609) argue that at this stage of a footballer's career "the seeds of migration are sown once they receive interest from foreign clubs". Using careership theory, this could also be identified as a key structural turning point (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997), particularly when we factor in the FAI Scouting Regulations which permit Irish players to go on trials from their fourteenth birthday. However, due to their young age, scouts require the consent of their parent(s). Scouts use a range of techniques to get the attention of players even

though they are not permitted to contact them directly. This is provided for in section 3 (a) of the FAI Scouting Regulations (2011, p. 2), which states that scouts "shall only deal with the Club for which the player is registered or was last registered with". However, as we can see, a number of the participants or their parents were contacted directly by scouts:

> "…Dad got handed a few times you know just [scouts' business] cards? Just to give them a ring and stuff. They would be interested in you." (Liam – individual interview)

> "…Dad normally tells me 'I was talking to this and that scout and we will get back to him' and then I would go to school, and I would come back, and Dad would say 'you are going to like so and so for a week next week'." (Ryan – individual interview)

- Mark: …like a specific day I remember playing...it was like the trials to get into an Irish squad out in the AUL and I remember playing really well that day and my dad would constantly talk to me on the side-line and he was approached by three or four different clubs [asking] who I was and where was I from and who did I play for and stuff like that. I remember my dad kept telling me I was the best player on the pitch that day and stuff. So, I remember that day pretty well.
- Interviewer: Okay and how did that make you feel when your dad was saying that?
- Mark: Proud because I could tell my dad was like over the moon, he was buzzing for the whole day because he was approached by all these different clubs wondering who I was and stuff. (Mark – individual interview)

> "I was just so happy to meet [the scouts], because they had nothing on them, they had no like [club] jacket or anything they were just like people just showing up and they just tell you who they are, and you are just like 'wow'. It' hits you a little bit." (Noah – individual interview)

The FAI Scouting Regulations (2011) are structured in such a way that professional football clubs have to contact an Irish schoolboy club in the first instance if they are interested in one of their players. Anecdotal evidence suggests that scouts realise clubs will look for training compensation and therefore they focus their attention on parents as well as approaching underage players. As we can see from Mark's comments above, when his father was approached by a scout "he was buzzing". Scouts use this approach because they realise the

power of making direct contact with a parent. Perhaps parents view this as empowering or perhaps there is a sense of relief, pride and joy that the investment of time and resources by player and parent may potentially pay off.

Approaching parents introduces emotion that would be unlikely to emerge if scouts dealt directly with the schoolboy club. According to Nutt (2007) local football clubs in England view scouts and the professional football clubs they represent with suspicion because they strip them of their best players. In Ireland scouts are viewed more positively because money from training compensation deals is used to fund full-time employees in amateur Irish schoolboy clubs. However, there have been many examples in Irish football where scouts use the relationship they have formed with a child's parent to leverage a reduced, and in some cases, a derisory training compensation package. In these cases, the schoolboy club get little or no money for the transfer or if a package is not agreed the professional football club simply move on to another child (O'Hara, 2015).

Evidence from this research suggests parents have little knowledge of how the trial process works and place considerable trust in scouts. This was particularly evident when the participants described their experience of going on trial to the UK which involved travelling without a parent or guardian, being collected in the UK by strangers and staying in accommodation which neither the parents or the participants had prior knowledge of in advance of travelling. Parents permitting their fourteen-year-old children to leave the country to go on trials on their own, highlights the trust and the position of power scouts possess in the game in Ireland. It should be stressed that the following examples relate to participants' experiences of trials when they were fourteen or fifteen years old.

> "You need to be fourteen to go on your first trial. Yeah that's what it was. I think it could have been over Easter before the Kennedy Cup, so we were all fourteen. You need to be that old to go alone without your parents and you obviously need a scout to bring you over because you are still under eighteen or under sixteen whatever." (Jack – individual interview)

> "He [his father] dropped me to the airport and then I would have met the scout and I would just go with him into kind of like a hotel digs kind of thing. Luckily there was another Irish fella there as well [who] I could talk to…" (Liam – individual interview)

> "My Dad used to drive me up to the Airport and then I'd meet [the scout] at departures...We would go from there and so…we would fly into Birmingham and get collected by a driver and he drives us to the hotel in [location in the UK] and then we kind of would have got dinner and went to bed then so...you flew on a Sunday and then it was Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and then home on the Thursday." (James – individual interview)

> "I would fly over. When you come out of the gate [in the UK] there would be someone, the [football] coach and they would like, bring you to the training ground. You would train, they would bring you back to the accommodation and then you do that every day until like the last day." (Ryan – individual interview)

> "Then on the way home they dropped us to the airport and they didn't even bring us in..., they kind of dropped us outside [of the airport] and me and [schoolboy teammate] had no idea [what to do] and you can't actually travel as a minor without adult consent, so we just had to ask the woman [at check-in] could she let us [go] home because we had no one else and she signed off as our guardian." (Mark – individual interview)

> "Yeah, they [parents] just drop you at the airport, you just get onto a flight, someone will collect you...a scout or one of the academy managers will collect you and bring you to your hotel or digs, wherever you are staying. They will tell you what's happening, then train in the morning and then go [back to the hotel or digs] and watch Jeremy Kyle for the rest of the day!" (Alex – individual interview)

There is no doubt the gap between schoolboy football in Ireland and first team football in the Premier League is widening. There are many factors we can attribute to this including the commercial and global expansion of the professional game and the free movement of players (Poli, 2006). Therefore, an opportunity to access this world is seen as a significant event. This however can lead to a laissez-faire approach from footballing authorities and parents to ensure the correct structures are in place and regulations are being adhered to. The findings indicate a lack of in-depth knowledge on the type of transitions a child will encounter in the football world in Ireland and abroad and a lack of meaningful preparation for their parents.

5.3 Football Trials - entering a new field

To transition from amateur schoolboy football in Ireland to a professional football club, the trial process requires young footballers to rebuild their career capital so as to stamp their social position in this new field (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). With this in mind, it is particularly important to understand how Bourdieu conceptualises positions within the 'field':

> …positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (situs) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.). (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 97)

Bourdieu describes the field as a social arena within which individuals and institutions occupy a specific social position based on the capital they possess. For footballers their skill and ability on the football field is their capital and their status as underage international footballers in Ireland affords them certain "power to influence the rules of the game" (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997, p. 36). However, for young players who travel abroad to participate in trials, they may find their capital (career, economic, social, cultural and symbolic) significantly diminished. This is because they are in competition with other young talented players from across the globe (with similar career capital) who are all vying for a contract with the professional football club. Entry into the field of professional football requires acceptance of and adaptability to its rules and values (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Giddens, 1997; Gearing, 1999; Hodkinson, 2008). In fact, Kelly (2014, p. 79) suggests that failure to "accept such values may generate unfavourable reactions from coaches and [new] team-mates". This is similar to Foucault's (1985) view of how society shapes moral codes of behaviour and how individuals govern their behaviour for fear of punishment. Punishment, for young Irish footballers participating in trials, consists of being sent home without an offer of a contract.

During the trial process, young Irish footballers interact with gatekeepers from the professional game in the form of coaches and scouts and other young footballers who are competing for the prize of a professional football contract. Jack provides an excellent insight into how competitive the trial environment can be:

> "It's a business. It's a production line. Every club you go to, certainly in the [professional football] academies…" (Jack – individual interview)

Hodkinson (2008) uses professional footballers to highlight the power they may have over employers due to their skill set being so valuable and much sought after by professional football clubs. However, Hodkinson (2008) pays little attention to the excessive wastage of young footballers (Bourke, 2002, 2003) along this indeterminate career path and the small minority of professional footballers who do reach this strong position of power. The football academy systems in the UK are also extremely competitive environments as thousands of players are vying for the very unique opportunity to become a professional footballer. Therefore, Jack describes the football academies as hostile to new entrants who attend trials:

> "…they are thinking like 'this guy is here for my position, I am not going to let him have that' or whatever so it actually is a battle." (Jack – individual interview)

Interestingly, Weedon (2012, p. 3) acknowledges that "little is known about the experiences of migrant youth footballers", but Jack provides an interesting insight into how youth footballers are treated by established academy players when they attend trials. The experience of going on their first trial with a professional football club varied for all the participants. For some, being offered a trial created a sense of disbelief and for Liam the invitation to go on his first trial was like a dream finally come true:

> "It's just your first trial. You were so nervous like. You have never thought like, you have an idea of what you wanted to do [as a career] but you never thought it would actually happen." (Liam – individual interview)

It is interesting to see the impact Liam's first trial had on him particularly the connection between his changing habitus and the strengthening of his future career aspirations. Bourdieu (1984, p. 166) suggests that the "habitus is necessity internalized and converted into a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions". For Liam and the other participants, the football trial facilitated the need or desire to progress their career. The trial altered the participants' horizons for action in a way that shifted their disposition from an aspirational vision to a subjective reality. Trials modified players' schemata changing how

they perceived their world (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Noah recounts how nervous he was on his first trial, but this feeling improved the more trials he went on:

> "The first one I remember going on to was Aston Villa, I was really nervous yeah. I was very nervous but once you get used to it, the first one is done, then you know what it's like…" (Noah – individual interview)

Hugh's first trial was with Manchester United, the team he supported and a club that regularly tops the list of the richest clubs in the world. It also has a strong tradition of signing Irish players who paved the way for the generation that watched them play, proving that a career in professional football was possible. In a similar way to Liam, for Hugh, the trial with Manchester United was confirmation of what he wanted to do as a career:

> "I was shell shocked. I was kind of like 'oh my God this is what I want to do [as a career]." (Hugh – individual interview)

Feelings of shock and awe were also noted by Dylan who attended his first trial with West Ham United:

> "I just think going over [to England] and even just putting a shirt on with that [West Ham] badge on...you are just thinking that this shouldn't be happening. It's really weird, it's just like as a kid that you never believe this would ever happen at such a big club as West Ham." (Dylan – individual interview)

Dylan encapsulates the intricate detail of the trial experience and the power and symbolic nature of a football jersey. For young footballers, the jersey (including the number), shorts and socks hold such symbolic value and receiving a football kit is confirmation they are officially part of the group.

Recounting participants' experiences helps us to understand how important trials are to young players. It highlights key influences such as seeing first team players and the significant difference between the football facilities in Ireland when compared to professional football clubs abroad (Bourke, 2002, 2003; Kelly, 2014). Seeing this difference for themselves was a key moment for a number of the participants in reinforcing their decision to migrate from

Ireland to become a professional footballer. The participants identified specific aspects of their trial experience which had a significant impact on them:

> "It was just the place and like it was unbelievable and just the coaches, the training. It was just everything I wanted." (Hugh – individual interview)

> "…when I started getting trials it's amazing, just going away, like training up in a park, to go and train at a multi-million training complex. Pitches perfect, great players all around you, coaches and then first team players that you are watching on telly since you were a kid as well." (Liam – individual interview)

> "…watching Match of the Day (Football programme on BBC) you are seeing these lads playing and all of a sudden to be asked to go and play for a team like Man City…Then they had their training grounds, and everything was phenomenal like. Inside indoor astros (pitches) and stuff and I hadn't seen that before." (Jack – individual interview)

> "I always liked the pitches. The pitches were so flat and it's just perfect and the ball just glides along the grass. That's what I love…The changing rooms obviously. Just the facilities are unbelievable at these clubs so it's just great." (Noah – individual interview)

It is evident from the reactions of the participants in this research, the trial provided access to a world that was once only visible as an outsider through a screen or from the seat in a football stadium. Access to the physical environment of a professional football club strengthens their embodied disposition to become a professional footballer (McGillivray, Fern & McIntosh, 2005) and unsurprisingly it had a huge impact on all interviewees. From a football development perspective, when a footballer reaches the investment stage (sixteen years old plus) in Jean Côté's developmental model of sports participation (1999), they want to transition to this stage in an environment that can provide them with the best possible chance of making it as a professional footballer. The football trial provides a taste of what they could have in terms of facilities that are simply not available in Ireland due to the lack of investment in football structures (Bourke, 2003). This particular point was made by James in his individual interview:

> "…I think Irish football is unlucky really because of the lack of money and the lack of academies over here and then people…give out about 'oh Ireland are this, Ireland are

> that', like they are competing against countries who are bringing the young lads up since they were like seven and eight in academies and I just think it's unfair." (James – individual interview)

McKenna (2013, p. 16) makes a similar point and notes "we have the players that can be competitive in the right environment, but we don't have the environment to create competitive players". James confirmed that his first trial was with Birmingham City and at fifteen years of age it shaped his decision to fully concentrate on football noting that "it's a chance isn't it like really". He explained that his first trial convinced him that he wanted to become a footballer:

> "Everything [was] over there. Just all based like around football. Five days a week playing football. Every young lad dreams about it really." (James – individual interview)

It was particularly interesting to note that James (who was in England with a professional football club at the time of the individual interview) was reflective on how the trial provided him with the opportunity to transition out of the life path that he believed was pre-determined for him. He compared his new career opportunity to one that would have been a mundane life of simply playing hurling and working *five days a week.* Remarkably, one of the reasons he decided to migrate to England was to play football on a full-time basis, *five days a week,* but he saw football as a career and not as work. This is an excellent example of someone matching their passion to a career which Newport (2016) is strongly opposed to because he contends that reality tends to fall short of the dream. He suggests that it is too simplistic to believe that you can identify your passion and then match a career to this passion. However, research completed by Vallerand et al. (2003) identified activities that individuals were passionate about as pertinent career paths. It is certainly not surprising that James is attracted to a career as a footballer because, like other professions which are performed in front of an audience, it can bring heightened gratification and adulation (Brown & Potrac, 2009; Kelly, 2014; Coupland, 2015; Calvin, 2017; Curran & Kelly, 2018; Platts & Smith, 2018). Indeed, for those who can access the world of football – "[t]he sheer excitement and intensity can lift players out of the everyday world into a kind of high octane, intoxicating existence" (Gearing, 1999, p. 47).

From James's tone, it was difficult to ascertain if his attitude to the alternative life he could have had, compared to the one he has now as a professional footballer, was conceited or simply

one of relief. Either way, his new position was undoubtedly informed by his family background (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). James was raised on a council estate, his father was unemployed, and his mother was an unskilled worker who provided child minding for a number of local children. Professional football may have offered James an opportunity to make a better life for himself, his family and the possibility of upward social mobility. Social mobility is a change in "wealth, education, and occupation over a person's lifetime or from one generation to the next in families" (Coakley, 2009, p. 337). James reinforces the notion that "a professional sports career is regarded as an opportunity to craft something special in terms of employment" (Coupland, p. 118).

Ian's experiences of trials in the elite football environment were positive and led to his on-going relationship with one Premier League club in particular. Trials reinforced his view that he does not want to be like everyone else in his home town or what he refers to as having a 'normal life':

> "It's a hard one to explain like but it's just football [has] shaped my life and personality because like there is a lot of people here [in my hometown], that will be here, and they are here now, and they are born here and they don't want to experience anything else, they just want to stay here and have a normal life. Whereas I [had] a taste of what it's like so I don't want to be here." (Ian – individual interview)

Ian's mother struggled financially as a single parent, working three jobs as an unskilled worker and trials had offered him a window into what upward mobility might look like. However, injury had prevented Ian from securing a contract with a Premier League club and he now found himself playing in the League of Ireland. Participants' attitudes towards the League of Ireland were quite muted. It is possible that the domestic game fails to create meaningful social bonds with the wider Irish population because of its limited availability on mainstream television, a lack of investment in facilities and a myopic over reliance on an existing fan base. In contrast, the English Premier League enjoys prime media attention and global financial investment (Richardson et al., 2012; Platts & Smith, 2018).

Participating in the League of Ireland was a forced turning point for Ian which resulted from an on-going injury. The difficulty when an underage footballer gets an injury is their transition to professional football is either restricted or ended, limiting their access to the facilities a

Premier League football club can provide. This has a significant impact on their habitus as it can change their perception of themselves and how they believe other people view them. They go from praise, attention and the highs of experiencing what a professional football club has to offer to rejection and disappointment (Roderick, 2003, 2006a; Brown & Potrac, 2009). For Ian, this is an example of a dislocating routine as he is still longing for the life he could have had as a professional footballer and this again highlights the need for supported transition (Scanlon & Doyle, 2018) for young footballers with the help of an EWO.

It will be interesting to see how the new under thirteen, under fifteen, under seventeen and under nineteen national leagues can improve the football environment and pathway in Ireland for young footballers. It is likely that a key structural turning point for young Irish players will continue to be the freedom to move abroad to a professional football club at sixteen years of age as provided for in the FIFA RSTP (2018) and European law (the impact of Brexit on international transfers is not yet known and therefore while worth noting, it does not form part of the analysis in this research). This section has shown that trials solidified participants' desire to move abroad because they were so awe struck with what was on offer. However, it is important for young players and their families to understand that a trial is a once off experience and does not reflect the reality of moving away on a full-time basis. Deciding to migrate requires a significant structural change in a person's life, for example, leaving their family and embracing a new culture (Bourke, 2002, 2003; Botelho & Agergaard, 2011; Kelly, 2014). The challenges presented by migration should not be underestimated.

5.4 Trials and Tribulations

Goffman (1959) believes that individuals modify their presentation of self, depending on the social setting or field they are in. Similarly, Churchland (2011) argues that the social context shapes human behaviour through imitation, so for example, individuals may act and behave one way with their family, and another way with their peers (Collinson, 2003). A trial with a professional football club undoubtedly necessitates a performance, not only on the pitch but off it. In effect, once a young footballer leaves Ireland, the new environment they transition to becomes their stage. This stage is the focal point of their aspirations as they attempt to close the occupational career gap between their current and future self (Hart, 2014b). However, the professional football environment does not always resemble the dream the participants had envisaged, and young players often feel nervous and alone:

> "I was kind of nervous, really nervous. It's hard going over and trying to play with people that you don't know… you have got to learn names and then they don't know if they trust you or if you trust them…" (Dylan – individual interview)

> "…you go to some places and you play against like, I went to West Ham and I was playing against Chelsea. I went to West Ham for two days, so I only had one game to sort of say 'right here I am' like…I went four hours to Chelsea on my own with the team on a bus with the scout. So, all I knew was the scout kind of." (Liam – individual interview)

The comments made by Dylan and Liam are interesting because they provide an insightful understanding of the trial experience for young migrant footballers which is absent from academic research or general discourse. Although they previously referenced their pride and wonder about playing in a multi-million pound training complex and wearing the clubs football kit, this is only one half of the story and in many respects these environments were unsupportive and superficial. The reality for young players going on trials involves mistrust, isolation and loneliness which is encapsulated in an environment that is extremely competitive and cut-throat (Roderick, 2003, 2006a; Woods, Buckley & Kirrane, 2005; Kelly, 2010, 2014; Calvin, 2017). Ryan, Alex and Hugh gave such detailed and often emotional insights into how difficult the experience of going on trial had been for them that their narratives are outlined individually below.

5.4.1 Ryan

For Ryan, the trial experience was personally difficult, and he highlights the lack of support for young Irish players when it is most needed:

> "First trial at Nottingham Forest was hard because I was, it was my first ever trial and I hated it and I just wanted to go home straight away and I got injured on the second day as well so… I just hated it like. Hated being away from home and I had to stay like for a week so that was in my head as well that 'I can't do this for a week like.'" (Ryan – individual interview)

Being away from family and friends during the trial process was identified by the participants as challenging. This practice is used by professional football clubs as it provides them with an opportunity to view a child over a week rather than at one-off events. This trial was clearly a painful experience for Ryan which was evident in his tone and body language as he recounted the incident. Recognising this, the researcher's follow up question was why he didn't just call his parents to go home? Ryan's answer reflects how these teenage boys strive to maintain a perception of stoicism (Denham, 2009):

> "I just didn't have the balls to really. I just took it on the chin, kept at it like." (Ryan – individual interview)

Ryan's failure to call for help may also have been impeded by being in a different country. He persisted with what was clearly a difficult experience for him and continued with the performance (Goffman, 1959; Stoecklin & Bonvin, 2014). It is also important to note that Ryan had not fully subscribed to the trial experience of his own volition and was heavily influenced by his peers, particularly those who were in the underage international team with him:

> "Like everyone was going over there [to England] so it was just kind of pressure just to go over and like keep up with the players that are going over there because they would be in the Ireland team with me, so you have to keep getting better." (Ryan – individual interview)

Ryan's decision to go on trial is an excellent example of the influence of peers (Eccles et al., 1993) and the pragmatic rationality of career decision making (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997) because it was based on social and cultural factors rather than purely independent logic (Ball, Maguire & Macrae, 2000; Hodkinson, 2008). Ryan was also aware that opportunities to progress in football are rare and being offered a trial with a professional football club is not something a young Irish footballer is likely to turn down (Kelly, 2014).

During the individual interview, it was interesting to see how open Ryan was about his experience of going on trial which was very pressurised in terms of, not knowing anyone, the uncertainty of getting a contract and being constantly under a microscope of having to perform (Calvin, 2017):

> "… you are going in to new people and…if you have one bad day everyone thinks you are bad like so... there is a lot of pressure going on trials… at the start it was a lot of pressure because I didn't know if I would get another one." (Ryan – individual interview)

Ryan's experience holds a certain likeness to Bentham's panopticon where the pressure to behave or perform is expected and monitored by those in authority. Ryan provided an interesting insight into the social aspect of trials and portrayed it as impersonal and very business-like:

> "It was really lonely because you didn't have much time to socialise because you just kind of focused on 'play well, play well' like." (Ryan – individual interview)

The loneliness of the trial experience is reflected in comments which a scout working in the English football system made about young players who go on trials – "[h]e's a bag of nerves. He needs to settle in, deal with the pressure of knowing no one" (Calvin, 2017, p. 219). Professional football clubs are looking to see how players adapt to being away from home as this will have an influence on their decision to offer a contract.

5.4.2 Alex

Using Amartya Sen's capability approach to understand transitions beyond school, Hart (2014a, p. 181), notes that "individuals with the same resources may have variable abilities to convert those resources into capabilities". Alex is a case in point as he possessed the resources or capital to become a professional footballer but found it difficult to convert this into practice. At the time of the individual interview Alex had not moved abroad to a professional football club. He remained in Ireland and was registered as an amateur with a League of Ireland under nineteen team. The pressure Alex was under during the period in which he was going on trials was outlined in a very honest appraisal of how he felt at the time:

> "…coming up to Christmas actually, I was supposed to go to Fulham, I think it was the week before Christmas and I was away for about six weeks before that on and off like and I didn't want to go, and I woke up in the morning and I was bawling crying...I said; 'I'm not going, I can't go. I just want to stay here with my family, it's Christmas. I don't

want to go over'. After that I kind of stopped going on trials for about six months I'd say." (Alex – individual interview)

As previously mentioned, a trial with a professional football club demands a performance, both on and off the pitch (Goffman, 1959; Stoecklin & Bonvin, 2014) and it is clear that the accumulation of these performances by attending trials over an extended period was for Alex, enervating and not sustainable. Although Alex did not explicitly state why he was unable to go on the trial to Fulham, Hart (2014a, p. 184) suggests that "[m]any aspirations fall by the wayside as they are perceived to be unattainable by the individual". It is clear Alex possessed the relevant capital (as he was an underage international player), but he was simply not enjoying football:

> "It was getting a bit too much for me. Like I was missing all the lads, missing my family and stuff and I don't know, it was like I was being...not used...but like I just wanted to go back enjoying football…" (Alex – individual interview)

Alex's reference to not being 'used' is interesting as it indicates that he had no one specifically to blame for the cycle of chaos he felt he was in. He felt he was being treated like a commodity and finally took it upon himself to end the trials for a period until he could refocus and spend time with friends and family. The trial process was a contradictory routine for Alex because he was dissatisfied with the experience due to the demands it was placing on him leaving little time for other aspects in his life. Although there was no direct pressure from family or friends to go on trials, Alex felt a certain sense of obligation. The following extract was very difficult as Alex was visibly upset:

> "…my family never put pressure on me. I suppose I was kind of putting it on myself like, that I have to make everyone proud, but they all said to me; 'if you don't want to go, just don't go'. As simple as that but I always kind of felt like if I didn't go, I'd let them down or something, like that was kind of the main thing. But that day before I went to Fulham was a tough one. I couldn't sleep…for the whole night and it was tough…I wasn't enjoying my football or anything and I wasn't playing as I should have been. So, I just said; 'I'm not going.'" (Alex – individual interview)

Dealing with the pressure of going on trial and being away from his family and friends was even more difficult for Alex as he appeared to get very little support. He did confide in his friends, but this unfortunately fell on deaf ears due to their lack of knowledge of the elite football environment. The need for support during this transition is evident (Scanlon & Doyle, 2018), and highlights the specific role an EWO could adopt in supporting young players like Alex to alleviate the pressure he was feeling:

> "I suppose like being away at fifteen, sixteen it's very tough. The lads were saying; 'how can it be tough…you are off playing premiership teams, training with premiership teams' but you don't know until they are in your shoes stuck in a hotel from two o'clock on after training, there's nothing to do, just watching telly. I don't know...I could have never went at sixteen…" (Alex – individual interview)

It is clear that the transition process Alex was going through caused negative emotions rather than positive ones highlighting the difficulty of converting one's capital, in Alex's case, his ability on the football field into his dream career. At present there is no support structure in Irish football to assist young players in the decision-making process if they are attempting to bridge the gap between living at home and playing amateur football in Ireland to a world that requires migration and working as a full-time footballer. It is suggested that the EWO could empower young talented Irish footballers by providing advice as well as acting as a conduit to provide them with a voice as they move between the variety of fields they inhabit (family, football and school).

5.4.3 Hugh

As Hugh developed his career by attending trials in the UK, it appeared that everything had fallen neatly into place and it looked as if he was certain to join one of the biggest clubs in world football. Hugh was riding on the crest of a wave during this period until it came crashing down when Manchester United confirmed that they were not going to offer him a contract, again highlighting the unpredictability of football:

> "I had a bad week, they brought me in and said, 'listen Hugh we don't want to sign you' and I was on my own and bear in mind, I had my heart set on it. They told me they were signing me; I was over there ten or eleven times. They told me they were signing me

from the fifth or sixth time and I was just going over and going over." (Hugh – individual interview)

It was obvious to the researcher that Manchester United were very interested in signing Hugh as they had taken him over on trial many times (similar to Ian's situation). However, when they changed their minds, this experience resulted in Hugh feeling a definite sense of rejection and is an indication of how cut-throat the professional football industry can be (Roderick, 2003, 2006a; Kelly, 2010, 2014; Calvin, 2017):

- Interviewer: How did you feel about being told at that time when they told you in Manchester United, how did you feel at that point in time?
- Hugh: It was the first ever kind of setback, major setback that I had. Everything up to then has always been success. Everything I am playing has been 'aw you are a great player' all this and then that was the first kind of major thing that kind of set me back, but I came back from it well.
- Interviewer: How did you feel at that time though?
- Hugh: I felt crap. Aw I have never felt so bad before in my life.
- Interviewer: And you were on your own?
- Hugh: Yeah. I had to fly back on the plane on me own and all. Aw it was tough, very tough.
- Interviewer: And who would you have liked to have been there with you at that point in time?
- Hugh: My Mam. I wanted my Mam yeah. And my Mam and Dad didn't know. They didn't know, so I was obviously coming back, and I was like 'I have all this bad news and I have let everyone down' and you know what I mean and my Mam and Dad thought 'my God he is going to Man United' like and then I come back with all this bad news and they didn't believe me at first, they thought I was messing.
- Interviewer: How did you break that to them? Were you here [in his family home]?
- Hugh: In the car on the way back from the airport. I actually haven't thought about it since. God that was a bad day…I was bawling. I was in bits.
- Interviewer: And how about your Mam and Dad? Were they upset?
- Hugh: Yeah, they were very; they were more upset for me. They weren't upset kind of like they were more upset for me. They knew I was gutted. They knew I had my heart set on it…. They were shocked more than anything else, they were shocked.

- Interviewer: And this is maybe a strong word but, any resentment towards Manchester United because of that?
- Hugh: Yeah definitely, definitely my Mam hates them now. Seeing them on the bleedin' telly and 'get them off'.
- Interviewer: Because of the way they treated you?
- Hugh: Yeah definitely and the thing is I love; I support Man United like you know. (Hugh – individual interview)

For Hugh, the trial experience with Manchester United at this time was juxtaposed as it was not only a highlight in his career path, but it was also his first major setback in football. Using careership theory, this type of turning point is identified as 'forced' (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997) because it is the actions of others that close off a specific pathway in his career trajectory. Hugh noted that whilst this was a difficult period in his life, he 'came back from it well'. Although, it is not explicitly stated, Hugh means that he managed to get his football career back on track by getting a contract with a different professional football club. Hugh's experience demonstrates the unpredictability of football and the challenges faced by young footballers who are all likely to face rejection at various stages of their career development (Bourke, 2003). However, Hugh also demonstrates his resilience to use rejection as a motivation to either prove that a coach's assessment of him was wrong or simply that he needed to improve his skills to achieve his career goals.

5.5 Summary

This chapter has highlighted how going on a trial with a professional football club creates a mix of emotions and the experience clearly varies depending on the club the participants went to. The participants' views in this research provide a unique insight into the professional football world that has been to date undocumented, particularly in terms of how the trial process operates. It is clear the high standard of pitches, facilities and coaches during this trial process certainly contributes to the desire to make the transition from Ireland to a professional football club abroad (Bourke, 2003). The trial presents an opportunity which many thought was unrealistic and unattainable. It is clear however that the experience is not always enjoyable with some of the players noting it was stressful, pressurised, competitive, hostile and lonely. The pressure to perform under these circumstances impacts players in different ways and it is

argued that assessing players in this system is not a reliable or accurate measure of ability (Bailey et al., 2010).

It is clear that a better support system is required for young players before, during and after the trial process. Scanlon and Doyle's (2018) 'new model for supported transition' places the child at the centre of the process. However, for this to be effective, an EWO needs to have an in-depth knowledge of the type of transitions a child will encounter in the football world in Ireland and abroad. By understanding this, the EWO can be prepared in advance to support the child and their parents to understand the impact (positive or negative) on the child and support them through this transition. Although, the FAI Scouting Regulations aim to implement best practice concerning trials, there continues to be a lack of enforcement that would move power from scouts to young players.

Chapter 6 – Combining Football and School

6.0 Introduction

The Irish education system requires students by law to commence compulsory education no later than six years old whilst continuing to sixteen years old or until the student has completed three years of second-level education (Amara et al., 2004; Department of Education and Skills, 2004; McCoy & Byrne, 2011; Street, 2011; O'Donoghue, Gleeson, & McCormack, 2017; Child and Family Agency, 2018). Second level education is broken into two distinct parts, the junior cycle and the senior cycle. The junior cycle is a three-year programme and for the participants in this research, it culminated with their first state exam, the Junior Certificate. The junior cycle programme is of particular interest as it coincides with specific milestones in the participants' football development such as involvement with the FAI ETP, going on trials with professional football clubs and involvement with underage international teams.

Within the senior cycle programme, students can decide to complete a one-year Transition Year programme if offered by the particular school they attend. Following the Junior Certificate and/or Transition Year, students select a two-year senior cycle programme which is either the traditional Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme or the Leaving Certificate Applied (Department of Education and Skills, 2004). The traditional Leaving Certificate is the route most students take (Smyth et al., 2007). A key distinction between the two secondary school cycles is the Junior Certificate sits within compulsory education whereas the Leaving Certificate takes place after compulsory education has been completed. This point is particularly relevant to the career decision-making processes of young talented footballers. Do they continue with their academic education when there is no legal requirement to do so and how is this decision influenced by the possibility of moving abroad to become a professional footballer?

The decision to move abroad to join a professional football club is influenced by what careership theory refers to as a structural turning point. As noted previously, a structural turning point is generally built into the fabric of a specific society such as the age requirement to remain in compulsory education (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Intertwined with the end of compulsory education in Ireland is another significant

structural turning point which takes place within the football world. In accordance with Article 19 (b) of the FIFA RSTP (2018), children who turn sixteen are free to join a professional football club in Europe if they can satisfy very strict conditions. Interestingly, one of the conditions set out in the said regulations for young players to migrate is the obligation on professional football clubs to prepare them for a career other than football. Therefore, how the participants managed their dual career whilst in a professional football club abroad and what supports were provided to do so will be examined in this chapter.

The European Commission recognises the demands athletes face with regard to their commitment to sporting programmes, which should not be at the expense of their education (Aquilina, 2009; López de Subijana, Barriopedro & Conde, 2015; Kelly et al., 2018). Brettschneider (1999, p. 122) argues that "juggling the demands of school and the demands of sport turns out to be an existential stress-test". Therefore, the analysis will critique the current structure of education in Ireland to examine if the secondary school system can facilitate an underage international footballer to actively engage in a dual career. Particular focus will be placed on the increase in demands placed on children as they progress through both the academic and sporting fields which requires careful planning and management to provide them with the best opportunity to succeed in both (Umbach et al., 2006).

Careership theory argues that our career decisions are pragmatically rational, involve interaction with others and are often transitionary in nature taking place over a period of time (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996). For young talented Irish footballers, their commitment to football is so significant that balancing education and football is tantamount to undertaking a dual career. A strong support structure is needed to facilitate this dual career as they attempt to strike a balance between high level sport, education and/or work (López de Subijana, Barriopedro & Conde, 2015; Stambulova et al., 2015; Andersson & Barker-Ruchti, 2018; Kelly et al., 2018). This chapter will present the findings from the third theme, combining football and school and will be discussed under five sub themes: inhabiting in two disconnected fields, balancing the Junior Certificate and football development, the influence of pre-contracts, senior cycle education, and education and professional football clubs.

6.1 Inhabiting in two disconnected fields

The European Commission have invested in research in an attempt to highlight the issue of managing a dual career (Amara et al., 2004; European Commission, 2012; López de Subijana, Barriopedro & Conde, 2015). This type of research is to be welcomed as it raises awareness of the concept of a dual career and creates a discourse among academic researchers, education providers and sporting bodies. Academic studies have also examined the relationship between education and sport within a number of different contexts, such as, football (Parker 1996, 2000, 2001, 2006; Gearing, 1999; Bourke, 2002, 2003; Christensen & Sørensen, 2009; McGillivray, Fern & McIntosh, 2005; McGillivray, 2006; McGillivray & McIntosh, 2006; Brown & Potrac, 2009; Platts & Smith, 2009, 2018; Jonker et al., 2010; Platts, 2012; Kelly, 2014; Andersson & Barker-Ruchti, 2018; Curran & Kelly, 2018), Gaelic games (Kelly et al., 2018), Olympic Sports (López de Subijana, Barriopedro & Conde, 2015), Boxing (Stronach & Adair, 2010), Basketball (Adler & Adler, 1985), Australian Football League (Hickey & Kelly, 2008), Rugby League (Coupland, 2015), National Talent Programmes (Jonker, Elferink-Gemser & Visscher, 2009) and Elite Sports Schools (Brettschneider, 1999; Metsä-Tokila, 2002; Stambulova et al., 2015). These studies are particularly useful in the investigation of the variety of demands placed on the participants in this study.

At a time when young talented Irish footballers are required to attend school, it is important to understand the commitment needed to continue progressing their football development or building their career capital. This requires dedicating time to high level deliberate practice which Ericsson, Krampe, and Tesch-Römer (1993) argue is one of the most distinguishing factors of elite level performance taking ten thousand hours to achieve. A busy football schedule, however, can lead to less attention being paid to academic studies (Meyer, 1990; Parker, 2000, 2006; Bourke, 2003; Brown & Potrac, 2009; Fredricks, 2012; Kelly, 2014; Curran, 2015a). Giulianotti (2004) suggests that specialisation in sports disciplines, with a view towards entering elite levels will ultimately lead to a shortfall in the development of academic education.

This is a particular issue for Giulianotti (2004) who argues that academic education plays a key role in facilitating personal and social development. Conversely, the Economic and Social Research Institute found that Irish students "who play more sport get better Leaving Certificate results" (Lunn, Kelly & Fitzpatrick, 2013, p. 102) and are less stressed at exam time. This

research however only provides a correlation between sport participation in a general sense rather than providing information on the optimum amount of hours sport can be played before it has a negative impact on academic results.

Students are also more likely to have a positive experience of schools that have a supportive environment, and this is determined largely by the connection students have with the school and the relationship they have with their teachers (Byrne & Smyth, 2010). The school experience at primary level for the participants in this study was generally positive. In particular, primary school was noted for the freedom and enjoyment it offered:

> "I have to say I did enjoy primary school, it was a good time in my life…you were just a young kid and just freedom and just enjoying life, I liked primary school because it's different to secondary school. Secondary school is so much more intense. And homework in my old primary school was, we didn't really get any. Then you go into secondary school [and you] get loads." (Noah – individual interview)

It is interesting to note the comparison Noah makes between his primary and secondary school experiences. It is acknowledged that secondary school can be more intense, however at thirteen Noah also began travelling over to England to train with a Premier League football club. Noah's father explained that the decision to do so was primarily based on the need to increase Noah's high-level contact hours in a professional football environment as this was not available in Ireland.

In primary school, football played an important role for many of the participants as it was used to build confidence and connect them socially to their friends outside of the classroom. For James, sport stood out as a significant part of his primary education as it created positive memories participating in and winning competitions for the school:

> "Sport, that would have popped into my mind straight away. Hurling was the main sport really…and then the football side of it you know, the five a side. We got to an all-Ireland final in the five a side and we won. We won it the next year so that was a big memory." (James – individual interview)

During their primary school years, a number of the participants noted that they also played other sports which included; tennis, rugby, hockey, hurling and Gaelic football. This is evidence that the pressure to specialise in football at this age was not prevalent. This correlates with Jean Côté's developmental model of sports participation (1999) that suggests during the sampling stage (six – twelve years old) children play a range of sports. This not only develops an array of skills and movements, it should also broaden their horizons for action and help them to identify their preferred sport before moving to the specialisation stage (thirteen – fifteen years old). In the specialisation stage, up to three sports may be played before deciding to pick one in stage three, the investment stage (sixteen years old plus).

The transition to secondary school coincides with children beginning to specialise in specific sports and this was referred to regularly by the participants. At thirteen years of age the participants were selected for the FAI ETP, at fourteen they were allowed to attend trials with professional football clubs abroad and at fifteen they had their first opportunity to play international football. This specialising stage in the participants' football development is significant when we consider that their secondary school played little or no role in this process. Interestingly, none of the participants identified a strong tradition of football in their secondary school and football and education were always separate. For them, school focused on the career capital required for entry into third level education and offered limited opportunities to build the necessary career capital they required. The career capital they sought was built through specialised training outside of the school environment (Fahey, Delaney & Gannon, 2005).

At the specialisation stage, we begin to see a polarisation of two institutions that play central roles in the participants' lives, one which is structurally enforced (attending school) whilst the other is chosen (playing football). In fact, the participants largely identified the education system as prohibiting a career in professional football rather than assisting it. The main reason identified was the lack of flexibility in school timetables or exemptions to delay homework or exams (Jonker, Elferink-Gemser & Visscher, 2009). Jack also noted that he disengaged from football in secondary school as he feared getting injured:

> "[Football's] not that serious in school…so I wouldn't like, I wouldn't risk getting injured and missing out on something like this [under sixteen international football] for a stupid school sport, that doesn't really matter at all." (Jack – focus group)

In Jack's case participation in what he viewed as a 'stupid' school sport had the potential to jeopardise his career capital rather than add to it. The disconnect between young talented footballers and the school they attend is a particularly important finding. With nearly thirty thousand secondary school students participating in FAI national cups and league competitions each year, the structure is certainly in place to promote football in schools (FAI, 2018b).

Interestingly, secondary school students can also progress to play for the Republic of Ireland. The best eighteen players are selected to participate in an annual tournament called the Centenary Shield (FAI Schools, 2018). The Centenary Shield is an under eighteen school's competition which involves the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England. However, the process of getting selected for the Irish international school team is another example of the disconnect between player and school. Remarkably, players do not have to play football for their school but rather they are nominated by the school to attend trials. Two of the four participants in this study, who did not sign for professional football clubs in the UK, namely, Alex and Aiden, played for the international schools team. There was a sense however that Alex and Aiden's involvement with the international schools team was not a priority for them.

To explain this further, it is important to distinguish the international schools team (whose players are selected from Irish secondary schools only), from the FAI's official international teams (under fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, nineteen and twenty-one's) who are selected from all sections of football. Putting this into context, the majority of players selected for the FAI's official international teams are with professional football clubs abroad (with the exception of the under fifteen and sixteen teams as the majority of these players will not have reached sixteen years of age). For example, the Ireland under seventeen team, including three used substitutes, who played against Denmark in May 2018, only included one player registered with a club in Ireland (FAI, 2018c). Thirteen of these players were all registered with professional football clubs in either England or Scotland.

The prestige of playing with the under seventeen international team involves participating in high-status UEFA European competitions which take place annually in prominent European cities. In fact, in May 2018, the under seventeen's European quarter-final fixture versus the Netherlands was televised on national television in Ireland. However, football, including international football, changes very quickly and only a small number of this under seventeen

team will progress to play under twenty-one level for Ireland. For example, the Ireland under twenty-one team, including three used substitutes who played Azerbaijan in March 2018 had only five players who had played at under seventeen level for Ireland (FAI, 2018d). Evidence from this research found that from the focus groups to the individual interviews, many of the participants failed to progress their international career which they noted was deeply disappointing and frustrating.

For Alex his participation with the international schools team was being used to channel his disappointment as he was not selected for the FAI's official under nineteen squad participating in UEFA European qualifiers. Aiden also used the international schools team to get recognised for the FAI's official under seventeen squad participating in UEFA European qualifiers (however he was also not selected). Although Alex and Aiden accepted it was a great honour to play for the international schools team, their comments clearly illustrate the difference in prestige compared to playing for the international team in official UEFA European competitions:

> "Last year I was with the Irish schools team which was good but it's still not the same as playing the nineteen's Euro qualifiers…that kind of knocked [my] confidence a bit but I used that as a kind of motivation to improve and when I'm with the twenty-one's [international team] I'll look back..." (Alex – individual interview)

> "I wanted to be a part of [the international schools team] because obviously to play and represent your country but also to get my name out there again and I thought if I was playing on an eighteen's team that I was surely going to get into a seventeen's team, but it didn't happen, but it was still great to be involved and I am proud of what we done." (Aiden – individual interview)

Aiden's reference to getting his name "out there again" is an excellent example of him attempting to use the international schools team as a transitional career field to build his career capital. In fact, Aiden also played several underage international fixtures for the country his mother was born in and his reason for doing so is intriguing:

> "I wasn't getting into the Irish team, so I thought maybe it would you know open their eyes towards me again. I thought it might revive or revamp my status [in Ireland] really." (Aiden – individual interview)

The steps Aiden took to get recognised illustrates his desire to play for Ireland, however neither approach worked, and he never played for Ireland again. This highlights the complex nature of how football is structured and the disparity between subjective hopes and objective chances (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). It also highlights that his relationship with international schools football was merely used to reinvigorate his profile to progress his career rather than to build a strong connection to his school.

The football and education systems have their own specific objectives to achieve and, in many respects, the only commonality between them is the child. The evidence in this research suggests a lack of any real connection for all of the participants with their secondary schools. This issue was also recognised by several countries and sporting bodies who at certain periods in their history placed the integration of high-level sport and academic education high on their agendas. For example, in 1965 when discussions took place in Sweden concerning young talented athletes discontinuing their education, a parliamentary working group was set up by the Swedish government to address the issue (Metsä-Tokila, 2002). During the same period, Finland also began setting up sports orientated schools and, in both circumstances, it was recognised that combining training with education required flexibility on behalf of the school and the training schedules of the athletes (ibid). In Denmark, the institution 'Team Danmark' strive to produce the 'complete sports person' a policy which is also adopted by The Football Association in Denmark (DBU) who require football talents in their teens to continue education alongside their football training (Christensen & Sørensen, 2009).

At a time when Irish football is beginning to see significant changes under the stewardship of Ruud Dokter, the FAI's High Performance Director, such as the introduction of the underage national leagues, the absence of an integrated approach with the education system is an obvious missing piece in the holistic jig-saw. To successfully integrate a dual career requires flexibility between the secondary school system and football development (Andersson & Barker-Ruchti, 2018). Countries like Sweden, Finland and Denmark, demonstrate that systems are in place to provide secondary school students with an alternative to migration during what Côté refers to as the investment stage (sixteen plus). A similar system in Ireland, might allow talented

footballers to complete their Leaving Certificate if they wish to do so. Without this type of structure, the lure of professional football abroad may be too tempting. The current structure narrows rather than broadens players' horizons for action as they are limiting their career options after football even though the success rate of becoming a Premier League footballer is only 0.012 per cent (Calvin, 2017). Up to December 2018, with only one of the eight participants in this study still with the same professional football club he signed to at sixteen, combining high-level football development with secondary education seems the obvious solution to provide a dual career in Ireland. However, further research would be required to assess the viability of this option.

6.2 Balancing the Junior Certificate and Football Development

Managing the demands of secondary school and high-level football is certainly not a new phenomenon or unique to young Irish footballers, the same issues face young footballers in other countries (Andersson & Barker-Ruchti, 2018). For example, in research completed by Christensen and Sørensen (2009) on young talented Danish male footballers aged fifteen to nineteen, a continuous dilemma for these footballers was how to balance their academic education and their football development. In Ireland, second level education brings increased workload and exam pressures. The challenge of balancing football and education was less apparent for participants who had little interest in schoolwork. Liam struggled academically and acknowledged that he was more concerned with being outside kicking a ball around rather than staying in to complete his homework, which resulted in sanctions from his school and conflict with his mother:

- Liam: I used to come home, bags in, get changed and straight out. Ignore my Mam like 'are you not doing your homework'? 'I didn't get any'…and what can she really say when I am saying that, I am just going out like.
- Interviewer: So, she wouldn't kind of said 'give me your homework journal'?
- Liam: Yeah, she would have checked it and 'why aren't you writing your homework' and she used to write notes asking why I wasn't getting homework because I would be always saying that I am not getting homework and just running out and trying to ground me, making me study. Taking everything out of my room to make me study and I would just sit there. One time I was in my Mam and Dad's room, they locked me in and everything trying to get me [to study] ...and there was a match [outside], we used to all

> play football just at the side [of the house] and I was refereeing the match from the top window. So, I was doing everything but studying really. (Liam – individual interview)

The image of Liam refereeing a match from the window of the upstairs bedroom he was sent to, to do his homework, provides an insight into his prioritisation of football. It also provides an insight into the difficulties parents face when their child's horizons for action are focused solely on success in one field.

Most of the other participants discussed wanting do well in their Junior Certificate but confirmed a lack of time as a key issue, particularly the challenge of fitting in study and homework with their football development:

> "When I was doing my Junior Cert that was very tough because obviously, I had like studying to do [but] I was kind of football, football, football. Trials, training with [the DDSL club], Emerging Talent [Programme] and then I had my Junior [Certificate] on top of it all. That was very busy, fifteen [years of age], yeah fifteen…I was cramming my studying in and I was cramming everything in. I was just tired." (Hugh – individual interview)

> "Third [year] yeah [the Junior Certificate] is definitely more hectic than first year and second year, definitely the pressure, there is more pressure, much, much more pressure." (Noah – individual interview)

Although Hugh and Noah identified themselves as honours students, the pressure to dedicate time to both school work and football created a definite conflict (Andersson & Barker-Ruchti, 2018). Having joined professional football clubs in the UK, neither Hugh nor Noah remained in school to complete their Leaving Certificate. Ryan used after school study to try to balance his time during his Junior Certificate year:

- Ryan: Junior Cert it was quite a lot of homework, so I did after school study, so I used to go to after school study, straight to training and come home. So that was it really.
- Interviewer: Was that your choice?
- Ryan: No, my Mum's choice. (Ryan – individual interview)

Ryan's mother insisted on after school study to ensure his homework was completed. Similarly, Noah's mother also made sure his homework was done before any football activity took place:

- Noah: Just looking back, I always went to training because I just loved football, but my Mam made sure I done my homework and done everything right so.
- Interviewer: How did you get the time?
- Noah: I wouldn't really have time. I would literally just come in from school, do my homework, go training, bed. That was sort of my day. (Noah – individual interview)

The findings of this research are consistent with those identified by Parker (2000) whose research on trainees in an English professional football club noted in particular mothers' anxiety about the need for their [sons] to continue to prioritise educational achievement.

All of the participants had to commit a significant amount of time travelling to and from football events such as training, matches and the FAI ETP. This was particularly relevant for the participants who had moved from their local schoolboy club. The pressure to participate in football matches at home and abroad can result in young footballers having to take "substantial amounts of time off school" (Parker, 2000, p. 65) and this was reflected in comments made by Hugh and James:

> "…when I started getting kind of more serious with clubs like Man United, I started going kind of like for a week when I was meant to be in school because they wanted to get a better look at me like you know. I was kind of going over there on a regular basis for a week or five days at a time and I missed a good bit [of school]." (Hugh – individual interview)

- James: …my Junior Cert year I was over in England for most of it like.
- Interviewer: How often would you have been over?
- James: I would say probably about ten times maybe in that year.
- Interviewer: And how did the school? Did they not raise any questions?
- James: They kind of did really. 'My God is James out again' things like this like but I think having [my football coach] as a teacher down there kind of just kind of helped me with that side of it.

- Interviewer: Ok and what was your Mam and Dad's attitude to being out of school a lot of the time? Were they ok with it...?
- James: Yeah, I think they were ok because they knew that I was going to be a footballer. I think if I was just out on trials for the whole year, I think they would maybe have said 'we would like you to cut down on it a bit' but...
- Interviewer: So, you were actually with [a professional football club] at that time, at fifteen?
- James: Yeah. (James – individual interview)

Missing school to participate in trials or to attend underage international fixtures was a regular theme throughout this research and at fifteen, players like James should not have been signed to professional football clubs. Christensen and Sørensen (2009) suggest that without sufficient balance in the young footballers' academic and football lifestyles, it may lead to poor exam results, high levels of stress, dropping out of school and/or a possible mental breakdown. During the under fifteen focus group, Aiden and Noah provided details about their travel commitments which appeared excessive particularly in light of football rules and regulations implemented in Ireland by the FAI and in Europe through UEFA. Aiden and Noah's stories are particularly insightful and as they gave such detailed and often emotional insights into how difficult the experience was for them. Their narratives are outlined individually below:

6.2.1 Aiden

As previously noted, Aiden was about to commence his Junior Certificate year when he transferred from his local schoolboy club to a high-profile club in the DDSL. If the FAI rules had been implemented at the time of the transfer, the distance between Aiden's home town and the Dublin club would have prevented him registering as a player. Implementing rules to prevent children traveling large distances to train and play has merit when we consider the limited time Aiden had to even complete his homework:

- Aiden: Well on a Wednesday, I'd come home from school and I'd have to leave straight away, and homework wouldn't actually get done. I wouldn't get home until ten or eleven at night.
- Interviewer: And how does that work then, Thursday morning when you have to go into the teacher?

- Aiden: Sometimes I can get it [homework] done before class or I'll write down any answer…or sometimes you just get away with it... (Aiden – focus group)

Aiden made a significant commitment to football during his Junior Certificate year and in fact the focus group (referenced above) was completed whilst he was out of school for a week on international duty with the under fifteen squad. As well as international commitments, he trained in Dublin two nights a week with a match at the weekend and he was also involved with the FAI ETP. While balancing football and studying made for a busy lifestyle, Aiden, like Dylan, James and Noah, was also quite nonchalant towards the Junior Certificate noting that it was 'easy', or they were 'intelligent enough' to do honours subjects with little effort.

The difference between the four boys was Aiden failed in his attempt to get offered a contract with a professional football club. Even though he and his father had made a significant commitment, dedicating time and travel to the pursuit of a career as a professional footballer, the opportunity did not materialise and was what Schlossberg (1981) might call a non-event. At the time of Aiden's individual interview, Ireland was experiencing a grave financial crisis and Aiden, who was now seventeen years old, was a lot more mindful of the need to go to college to prepare for a career outside of football rather than leaving school early:

> "…there are no jobs out there really like without a degree. If I was to go straight into work, I'd probably pick up something you know an average job. No disrespect but like you want to aim higher, like I don't want to remain on a minimum wage for the rest of my life. You want to go to university and get a degree, so you can get a good job, good money." (Aiden – individual interview)

Aiden had not completely relinquished his aspiration to become a professional footballer and was re-building his football career capital with an underage League of Ireland club. However, Aiden's decision to pursue third level education demonstrates how he evaluated the career capital he possessed relative to his position in the field of professional football. This necessitated a *broadening* of his horizons for action in terms of career options. It is important to distinguish between broadening his horizons for action and refocusing them completely. His desire to go to college demonstrates that an individual's habitus can adapt to plan for an alternative future (Coupland, 2015) or indeed multiple futures.

6.2.2 Noah

Although Aiden had moved to a club over one hundred kilometres away, which proved difficult to manage in terms of his schoolwork, Noah commuted to a professional football club in England. During the focus group with the under fifteens in 2013, the participants were casually discussing the relationship they had with their school teachers. During the conversation Noah stated, "you see when I go over to [the professional football club in England], I have to get work to bring over". The researcher had been told prior to the focus group with the under fifteens that Noah had received significant interest from a specific Premier League club and it was obvious this was something Noah wanted to introduce into the conversation. However, as Noah was only fourteen and the other players were fifteen, the researcher had not considered the possibility that a player of this age would be training in another country. This raised immediate concerns on a number of levels. From a football perspective, his regular attendance with a club in England could not have been sanctioned by either the SFAI or the FAI due to their rules and regulations. Noah was also in breach of FIFA's RSTP as he would not have been sixteen for another eighteen months. A more serious concern however was Noah's lack of attendance at school. During the individual interview, Noah provided further details of his travel arrangements from Ireland to England:

- Interviewer: Ok so can you just give me an idea then of your career at [the Premier League club] so far. So, at what age then would you have signed?
- Noah: Thirteen, when I signed for [the Premier League club] …I was going over every second week. So, for three days I would go to England to [the Premier League Club] and the rest I would be here [in Ireland]. Doing that for a year and then the year after that I was going every week…but for like three days again. (Noah – individual interview)

Noah explained that he attended a secondary school whilst he was in England. However, the curriculum was different, and he did not attend school with the main student population. He received one to one lessons from a tutor who had been assigned to him to assist specifically with his Junior Certificate but balancing football and education remained a challenge:

- Noah: That was a mad year and I was doing my Junior Cert as well so.
- Interviewer: Yeah so how did that balance? How did you balance all of that?

- Noah: It was sort of the same as the year before but just more football. More with [the Premier League club]. They just wanted me more.
- Interviewer: Was that important for you and for [the Premier League club]?
- Noah: Yeah, I think so because they just saw me more didn't they? They just seen me more and more.
- Interviewer: And why would that have been important for you as well?
- Noah: Playing with better players and getting fitter and stronger I think…it was a bit stressful because obviously doing the Junior Cert so it's a bit; it was a bit stressful to be honest.
- Interviewer: Yeah and what did the [Irish] school say?
- Noah: Oh, they just had to go with the flow sort of because [the Premier League club] wanted me over. They could have said no but like I think they were just grateful to have a lad like me in the school. They just said, 'we will do everything we can for him'. So, it was nice in that way. (Noah – individual interview)

Formal agreements were clearly put in place to facilitate Noah's dual career. Noah's parents used a network of individuals within the professional football club in England and in his secondary school in Ireland to ensure Noah maximised his potential as a footballer whilst maintaining his academic studies. As a result, his education was structured around his football development rather than the other way around.

6.3 Influence of Pre-Contracts

A key issue identified in this research was the impact of a pre-contract on the participants' attitude to their education in Ireland. A pre-contract involves a professional football club in the UK signing young Irish footballers before they are allowed to migrate (pre-sixteen). In terms of career progression, this can be identified as a structural turning point which occurs due to the external decisions of institutions, in this case the professional football club (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). If a pre-contract was signed, it significantly changed the participants' horizons for action and caused disruption at an important stage in their education.

Pre-contracts are an instrument professional football clubs use to demonstrate their commitment to a young player. The reality is that these are informal agreements that are completely unenforceable because the FIFA RSTP (2018) restricts the international transfer of

children until they have reached sixteen years of age. Professional football clubs are aware of this and have been known to renege on their promise to sign young Irish players for reasons such as; the player's performance levels decline; the professional football club is unable to negotiate training compensation with the schoolboy club(s) in Ireland or the player gets injured. In fact, this is exactly what happened to Liam who had signed a pre-contract but when he got injured at fifteen, the professional football club no longer wanted to sign him. By having pre-contracts in place, professional football clubs create a false sense of belonging and this had a significant impact on the participants' attitude to their education.

> "I went to school for four months, from September to December and I used to just sit there. I didn't do anything in school, I just went to waste time because I wasn't moving to England until January…so I had to go to school and like teachers were just, like not picking on me but slagging me all the time saying I didn't do my homework or anything." (Max – focus group)

> "When I was doing my Junior Certificate, I signed already so I was kind of like going through the motions because I wanted to go over like. I knew I was going over, so I was just kind of like 'well what am I doing here like'? I probably could have done a few higher [level subjects] if I really like proper concentrated and worked hard but I just kind of like 'oh I will just get through this". (Ryan – individual interview)

> "When I started third year, I knew I was going to go to England, so I kind of took my foot off the pedal with the education…I would have bits of my homework not done, and I would say 'fuck it I will go to bed like' you know what I mean? 'I'll go to bed, I am back from training I will go to bed' and that was it like." (Hugh – individual interview)

As we can see Max, Ryan and Hugh, disengaged from their secondary school education in Ireland when they knew they were being offered a contract. Using careership theory this can be identified as a confirmatory routine in terms of their football career progression because it develops a new identity that the participants had hoped and intended (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). However, this transition can cause a significant disruption in other parts of their life due to their new self-perception (Schlossberg, 1981). For example, their previous routine of attending school may become contradictory because it is considered irrelevant to their future

career and this "experience is no longer adequate or appropriate" (Hodkinson, & Sparkes, 1997, p. 40).

6.4 Senior Cycle Education

Completion of the junior cycle programme coincides with the end of compulsory education and from a football development perspective the participants moved into what Jean Côté refers to as the investment stage (sixteen years plus). At sixteen, a key structural turning point occurs because the FIFA RSTP allows young talented footballers to migrate to complete their investment stage on a full-time basis in a professional football environment. Interestingly, for the participants who remained in Ireland their compulsory education ended, whereas the participants who migrated were required, by the FIFA Regulations referenced above, to maintain some form of education or training to prepare them for a career if professional football did not materialise. This section will therefore focus specifically on the role of education in the lives of the participants who remained in Ireland.

Out of the twelve participants in this study, five of them (Ian, Mark, Jack, Alex and Aiden) completed their Leaving Certificate with each having a very different and unique journey. This is an important point because the participants reshaped their horizons for action and engaged with the Leaving Certificate programme even though they had completed their compulsory education. It is also worth noting that these five participants also transitioned to third level education. This raises a particularly interesting point about the fluidity of an individual's habitus and its relationship with the field they inhabit (Foskett & Hemsley-Brown, 1999). This fluidity involved the participants' change in attitude towards third level education. They had previously dismissed tertiary education to concentrate on developing a career as a professional footballer. However, rejection by the field of professional football had led to a re-conditioning of the habitus (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). This reflects a key point in careership theory which notes that our horizons for action are shaped by our "[h]abitus and the opportunity structures of the labour market" (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997, p. 34).

Having the perspective of individuals who progressed to the senior cycle programme in secondary school is valuable. It helps us to understand how the participants balanced their dual career compared to those who signed with professional football clubs. It should be noted that at the time of the individual interviews Mark and Alex were the only ones who had competed

their Leaving Certificate exam. The participants who were in senior cycle at secondary school suggested that fifth year (or year one of the two-year senior cycle programme) was particularly important because they believed, this was where new course material was acquired, and the majority of the work was undertaken if they were to be successful in completing the Leaving Certificate in sixth year:

> "I'd say at the moment fifth year is a big deal. People see fifth year as the year that's like 'ah sure it's only leading in to sixth year but actually you need to do most of the course work in fifth year, so you need to know it well. It's when you kind of realize that there is a lot expected of you in school." (Jack – individual interview)

> "I'd say fifth year is probably the busiest year because sixth year is more about revision. Fifth year you get the most homework because you are learning all the stuff and then in sixth year it's, half of it is just about revision and revising what you did in fifth year." (Aiden – individual interview)

> "Well I'm sure it varies from school to school, but we did a lot of work in fifth year so sixth year wasn't too bad. I know in other schools fifth year is taken as a lead into sixth year. So, it's definitely...it's hard but it's definitely doable." (Mark – individual interview)

The information provided by Jack, Aiden and Mark is particularly important as it demonstrates the pressures of senior cycle. The role of an EWO in a football club could play an important supportive role to act as a liaison for young footballers with their parents and teachers during busy periods in the school and football calendars.

During the individual interviews it was evident that three of the participants (Ian, Aiden & Alex) struggled to deal with the reality that they had still not managed to join a professional football club and they were no longer being selected for Irish international squads. The fact that they continued to chase this dream while preparing for their Leaving Certificate highlights that a career as a professional footballer was still firmly within their horizons for action albeit further away than they would have hoped. Jack was the exception in the group of five who completed their Leaving Certificate as he had experienced life with a professional football club in England noting that he returned home to pursue his education after terminating his football

contract. Therefore, the sense of yearning Ian, Aiden and Alex experienced was not evident for Jack.

Aiden continued to pursue the dream of becoming a professional footballer during the senior cycle:

> "There were nights when I didn't do my homework...I wasn't really organised enough with school and football" (Aiden - individual interview).

However, Aiden also stated, "I want to get a good education" and although this might appear contradictory because he in turn neglected it, it demonstrates the constant struggle young talented footballers have with managing their identity in two separate fields and their struggle to manage the demands of both. Upon completion of his Leaving Certificate, Aiden was offered a football scholarship in a University in the United States. The football scholarship offered Aiden the opportunity to pursue a supported dual career at third level.

Mark also wanted a career as a professional footballer but accepted the need to complete the Leaving Certificate in order to prepare for a career after football if this ambition was not realised. The level of commitment Mark put into his Leaving Certificate preparation required support not only from his family but also from his under nineteen League of Ireland football manager who provided flexibility to miss training. The demands placed on secondary school students are significant as they progress through the senior cycle, but this is widely deemed to be necessary in order to get into a good course in college/university:

> "…to get a Leaving Cert that will get you into college, get you into a good course to get you somewhere, you need to be studying...like I do a full day of school and then do like four hours of homework afterwards. To do that and to train at the level and the intensity of an English club it's probably...like it's very hard if not close to impossible." (Mark – individual interview)

Mark was mindful of the amount of points he would need to get into university and the consequences of not getting the required points for his course of choice. However, Mark's commitment to this study and acceptance that his football career would suffer is likely to have been made easier by the knowledge that (subject to his Leaving Certificate results); he had been

accepted onto a highly sought-after scholarship programme. This provided admittance onto a university degree programme, a bursary, access to high performance facilities and a pathway to League of Ireland football.

Alex's story is an interesting example of how difficult it is for players who want to balance their commitment to school and football during their senior cycle. Alex went from being an honours student in his Junior Certificate to ending his secondary school education with a below average Leaving Certificate (the average was three hundred and forty-five points) (CAO, 2014) because he was unable to manage the demands football was putting on him during this time.

> "Well I got three hundred points in my Leaving Cert which is average I suppose…in sixth year I was a bit wary because after Christmas there was a few club's [in the UK] interested in me, so I was kind of putting football ahead of school a bit. I wasn't really studying and stuff..." (Alex – individual interview)

The difficulty for Alex is the Leaving Certificate he received left many third level courses beyond his reach, particularly the course he wanted to complete (Arts). It could be argued that a school-based career guidance teacher is ideally placed to advise on and to structure achievable goals for young talented players (Bright et al., 2005). However, Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997, p. 35) argue that a key reason some young people reject career advice is because it may lie outside of their horizons for action and "does not fit with their existing schematic view of themselves or their perceptions of appropriate careers opportunities".

For Alex, career guidance was provided by his underage League of Ireland manager who directed him to a one-year bridging course that added points to his Leaving Certificate result. This course is delivered through a partnership between the FAI and a number of Education and Training Boards, providing an opportunity to train full-time whilst completing a government recognised Quality and Qualification Ireland Level five course in Sport and Recreation studies. This model of education combines academic programmes with football and is interesting because it provides the type of dual career option the European Union is seeking to promote (Amara et al., 2004; Aquilina, 2009; European Commission, 2012; López de Subijana, Barriopedro & Conde, 2015). While this course was not Alex's preferred entry route to university, his participation in it shows the nonlinearity of career pathways (Coupland, 2015).

The integrated model used by Alex as a bridging course to get into university is similar to what professional football clubs in the UK use when they recruit sixteen-year-old players from abroad. However, the next section will highlight how the education programmes provided by professional football clubs are not used in the same way Alex used his course - to progress to third level. In Sweden, they have introduced sports schools that specialise in football and the programme correlates to four academic levels that include; elementary (age 10–12), secondary (age 13–15), high school (age 16–18) and university (age 18+) (Andersson & Barker-Ruchti, 2018). Structurally, the system in Sweden is very similar to Jean Côté's developmental model of sports participation and it is interesting to note that during the 'investment stage' of their football development, the programme in Sweden facilitates the dual career of over two thousand male footballers aged between sixteen and eighteen. This provides an alternative option to migration. Although it is not being suggested that sports school are the solution to address the issues faced by young talented footballers in Ireland, with the FAI introducing underage national leagues at younger age levels, the need for a new model to manage a dual career is an ever-pressing issue.

6.5 Education and professional football clubs

It is important to understand that, irrespective of the high failure rates of young players making it to first team football, pursuing a career as a professional footballer is an attractive option:

> "I found football a prestigious route to go and an easier way for me to go and it's something I've always wanted to do…every kid around here has wanted to do [it] so, why wouldn't I go for that?" (Dylan – individual interview)

For young players like Dylan, when their aspirations to become a professional footballer are confirmed by a professional football club offering them a contract, they normally want to seize the opportunity. As previously noted, under FIFA regulations professional football clubs are obliged to provide adequate training for alternative career options and the reason for this is reflected in comments made by former international Damien Duff "when you're a footballer you just think you're invincible. You don't think about life after sport" (cited in Byrnes, 2017, p. 80). It is important to examine what the structure of education programmes looks like in professional football clubs and how young Irish players experience these programmes. The

data indicates that they are much less demanding than the senior cycle programme in Ireland, as Hugh described:

> "You would go in [to school] every morning, you would do an hour, then you would train. You would have your lunch then you would go over and you would do another hour [of schoolwork]. It's like assignments. You are given assignments to do and you have to have them done by a certain date…you could copy and paste but you had to change it up a bit like, so it was easy." (Hugh – individual interview)

From Hugh's comments, it is evident that the structure of academic education provided by professional football clubs is not as intense as the senior cycle system for young footballers who remain in Ireland. In fact, all of the participants signed to professional football clubs noted that the other young footballers and academy coaches paid little or no attention to academic progress (Brown & Potrac, 2009). This could be attributed to the limited value academic qualifications offer within a professional football club to advance their career (McGillivary, Fearn & McIntosh, 2005; McGillivray & McIntosh, 2006; Brown & Potrac, 2009). Players in turn appeared to pay little attention to course requirements, demonstrating nonchalant and dismissive attitudes towards schoolwork (Parker, 2000, 2001, 2006; Richardson, Littlewood & Gilbourne, 2004; Cushion & Jones, 2006; McGillivray, 2006; Christensen & Sørensen, 2009; Platts & Smith, 2009; Kelly, 2014; Andersson & Barker-Ruchti, 2018). James provided an excellent insight into the attitude towards education within a professional football environment, particularly amongst other young footballers:

> "Among the players, I think it's just kind of like a doss…obviously it is understandable like you do get days where you just don't want to do anything. With the coaches they kind of, not really force you to do it but like there are things like fines and things like that if you don't put in the work [but] there is banter all day…but obviously there is time when you just have to kind of get down and work…you get assignments and you just type them up on the laptop and just try get as much [as you can done]." (James – individual interview)

Rather than seeing academic programmes as an opportunity to develop a dual career, they were distinctly situated on the periphery of their horizons for action for the young academy players (McGillivray, Fern & McIntosh, 2005; Brown & Potrac, 2009). Essentially, these young

players have *chosen* football as their career whereas their role as a student is an imposed condition which *compels* school attendance. Without FIFA's regulations imposing an academic component as part of their international transfer, it would be interesting to see what role it would play in their lives, if any.

Jack confirmed during his individual interview that he had returned home to Ireland to re-engage with his secondary school education to complete the Leaving Certificate and was critical of the tuition he received from the professional football club he was signed to:

> "I would definitely advise getting the Leaving Cert. Absolutely get a Leaving Cert. Because being over there [in England] after seeing the education, it's…woeful because you are not actually learning anything…you get a gym qualification but there are only so many gyms around and there are thousands of these kids coming out of these academies after doing this and all they have got is a gym qualification…the thing that bothered me was you are not learning anything. In school [in the football academy] you are given a book and you just have assignments but all the assignments you write into a computer and you just, it's in the book. So, you are just looking through the book and then you are copying it down. So, like you are not getting any smarter doing that." (Jack – individual interview)

Jack recognised that the gym qualification he had received was unlikely to provide him with what he considered a satisfactory career outside of football. It is important to note that during the focus group in 2012, Jack mentioned that if he did not become a footballer, he would like to study medicine. It was evident that Jack was passionate about his academic studies and this may be attributed to his family's influence, who considered education to be significantly more important than football. Jack explained that his parents refused to allow him attend trials during his Junior Certificate year, which was in stark contrast to all of the other participants. It is questionable as to whether Jack's decision to return home should be viewed as a *broadening* of his horizons for action because he had always considered his education as an important component of his future career path. Returning home to Ireland also provided him with the opportunity to continue building his career capital in football through his involvement with a League of Ireland club, even though he acknowledged it was a lower standard than the UK. As Jack's decision to return home to concentrate on his Leaving Certificate was his own choice,

using careership theory, this can be identified as a self-initiated turning point which came about because of the contradictory routine he found himself in (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997).

All of the participants who migrated to a professional football club noted that it was an extremely difficult process but necessary if they were going to maximise their opportunity to pursue a career as a 'first team' professional footballer. Therefore, it is understandable that the participants who made the move abroad wanted to ensure they took full advantage of the opportunity they had been given. As a consequence, their education in the professional football environment was not their priority during this period in their life which Max and Dylan discussed:

- Max: Like [education] is good to have like but it's mainly football, that's the reason you're there, why you moved away from home.
- Dylan: It's second choice like whenever you moved.
- Interviewer: It's second?
- Dylan: Football has to be your number one priority because it's your job.
- Max: You have to earn a living like that's your first thing… (Max & Dylan – focus group)

The comments from Max and Dylan illustrate how young footballers justify their decision to prioritise football over their education. Similar to findings identified in research completed by Bourke (2002), there was an acknowledgement among all of the participants in the focus groups and individual interviews that they did not view education negatively, but it was simply a matter of choice. This highlights that young footballers are not "devoid of academic potential. Instead, a more plausible argument is that academic potential is sidelined in favor [*sic*] of immersion in the footballing dream" (McGillivray, Fern & McIntosh, 2005, p. 113). Coupland (2015) also supports this point noting that the past experiences of athletes and their immersion in a field or career such as professional sport may inhibit the possibility of seeing education as a mechanism to prepare for alternative future career options.

By the end of 2018, the only participant who remained in the UK with the professional football club he had signed to as a sixteen-year-old was Noah, who was yet to reach first team football. This is over three years after his individual interview was completed and his comments in 2015

were particularly revealing, highlighting the complex relationship young footballers have with academic education in the professional football environment:

> "Like next year is when I'm actually becoming like a full-time footballer if you get me? You do a bit of school but not as much next year." (Noah – individual interview)

Intriguingly, the individual interview reveals that Noah who had been with a Premier League club for four years (three years unofficially) still did not see himself as a full-time footballer because of the obligation to attend school. This demonstrates that for him, having to attend school had a certain stigma attached to it and his transition as a full-time footballer was not fully complete. This demonstrates the distinct separation of education and football development whereas it should have been an integral part of his entire holistic development due to the likelihood of not reaching the first team. Noah's comment is a reminder that these young footballers live their lives from year to year and are constantly managing an uncertain future and a dual career does not appear to be an important component. The role of the EWO in professional football clubs is critical if a dual career is to be integrated in this environment.

6.6 Summary

The knowledge that a contract with a professional football club was a possibility, strengthened the resolve of the participants to build their career capital, that is, skills that are rare and valuable (Newport, 2016). To do so, during what Côté's (1999) refers to as the specialising stage (thirteen – fifteen years old), the participants attempted to balance their Junior Certificate and attend trials with professional football clubs. In addition to attending trials, participants made tremendous efforts to travel large distances from their homes for training and matches. The reason for this commitment was to increase contact hours in environments they believed would increase their chances of becoming a professional footballer.

The data also revealed that school played little or no role in football development during the specialising stage (thirteen – fifteen years old). We begin to see a polarisation of two key institutions that play formative roles in participants' lives, namely football and school. This is largely due to the level of commitment needed for both and the inflexibility of the two systems to provide a dual career. This separation is intensified when the participants realise it may be possible to play professional football as a career. As Dylan stressed, he could not refuse the

opportunity being offered to him because football clubs recruited on a global scale and therefore, the opportunity may not come again (Bourke, 2002).

Pre-contracts played a significant role bolstering the participants' resolve to become professional footballers. Once the junior cycle was completed this ended compulsory education and we begin to see a split in the career paths of the participants during what Côté (1999) refers to as the investment stage (sixteen-year-old plus). At sixteen, a key structural turning point provides the opportunity to migrate to a professional football club. For those who failed to make the move to a professional football club, it illustrated the complex nature of careers and the role of serendipity. This resulted in these participants having to broaden their horizons for action to at least consider completing their Leaving Certificate as a career in professional football had not materialised as had been hoped. Although they continued with their football development in Ireland, it required a constant balancing of their academic education during the senior cycle programme. The participants who were offered contracts with professional football clubs had less difficulty balancing their academic education as the education programmes provided by the professional football clubs were less demanding. The data suggests that irrespective of whether the participants remained in Ireland or migrated to the UK, neither option provided a model adequate to balance their football development and preparation for an alternative career outside of football.

Chapter 7 – The Process of Migration: A Necessary Evil?

7.0 Introduction

Although the game of football has changed very little on the pitch since the formation of the Football Association in 1863, it has seen considerable change off it. The commercialisation, professionalisation and popularisation of the game across the globe has contributed to the migration of the most talented players to the most popular leagues and Irish players have contributed to this phenomenon. The findings in this chapter have certain commonalities with those of research completed by Bourke (2002) whose research did not focus on a specific cohort but instead captured the lives of football players who left Ireland between 1984 and 1999. However, it is useful to compare the experiences of players separated by over thirty years to examine how the game has changed (positively or negatively), if at all.

The practice of recruiting young players is recognised as a key strategy for professional football clubs who employ full-time scouts to work in specific geographic locations such as Ireland (Bourke, 2002, 2003; Weedon, 2012). The participants noted that scouts played a significant role in influencing their decision to join a professional football club. As stated, in many cases scouts offer pre-contracts to children as well as negotiating the levels of training compensation which Irish schoolboy clubs are entitled to in accordance with the FIFA RSTP. The recruitment of children is very rarely questioned and has become the norm and an accepted practice in countries with limited resources such as Ireland who are unable to provide a full-time professional football career. It is interesting to note that the participants in this study who had not moved abroad had all signed with underage League of Ireland squads. However, this was not the participants' preferred career path. Choosing the League of Ireland is, for players under eighteen years, a relatively new alternative since the introduction of underage national leagues by the FAI. However, when sixteen-year olds are offered a contract with a professional football club in the UK, this is generally the option young Irish players choose.

For young Irish footballers, making the decision to migrate should involve a careful assessment of factors such as their education and leaving their family and friends. However, the findings in this research suggest that because the participants' identities had become so absorbed with becoming a professional footballer, they were unable to step outside of their horizons for action. This is not surprising as our identity is inextricably linked to our occupation (Ball,

Maguire & Macrae, 2000) and career decisions are integral to how people identify themselves (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996). For young Irish players, being offered a contract with a professional football club is the next step in the recognition of their ability and for them, the ideal transitional career field that can get them one step closer to their dream career. This chapter will discuss the findings from the final theme in this study, the process of migration and will be developed under five sub themes: fear of failure, the role of the family in football advancement, living without family and friends, migration, and preparing for a career after football.

7.1 Fear of Failure - structure, reality and status in society

Participants who were signed to a professional football club in the UK described an acute fear of failure that was enhanced because they feared the embarrassment of being released and having 'nothing' in Ireland to come back to. Roderick (2006a, p. 246) suggests that as a workplace, the professional football environment creates an "ever present possibility of career failure and rejection". This fear of failure is heightened by the considerable investment the participants have made to build the necessary career capital to progress to first team football with a professional football club (McGillivray, Fern & McIntosh, 2005; Brown & Potrac, 2009). This investment "in the self-as-athlete reinforces a lack of consideration of alternatives beyond the playing career… [resulting] …in a premature narrowing of focus with academic and social goals" (Coupland, 2015, p. 112).

Failure to make the progression to first team football will result in the participants facing two possible outcomes. Firstly, if they have prepared for an alternative career, then this simply involves broadening their horizons for action to follow an alternative career path. This may also allow them to rebuild their career capital in football if they so wish. Therefore, it is argued that broadening of a person's horizons for action is less volatile because the individual is prepared for the possibility of an alternative career making this transition less traumatic. Secondly, if they have not prepared for an alternative career or the possibility of same, then this will require a 'refocusing' of the participants' horizons for action. The process of refocusing, the researcher suggests, will very likely be a greater challenge due to a lack of perspective and preparation for an alternative career. However, both cases highlight the requirement for supported transition (Scanlon & Doyle, 2018) and this should be provided by an internal support system when they arrive back to Ireland. This internal support system

should include their family, friends, as well as institutional support (Schlossberg, 1981) such as the FAI to help them reintegrate back into society from a career/education and football perspective. When players return having 'failed' it is sometimes forgotten that they were once considered one of the best footballers in their age group in the country playing at an international level.

The unpredictability of careers such as professional football can quickly become apparent through forced turning points such injury or rejection from a professional football club (Roderick, 2003). However, as Schlossberg (1981) explains, if transitions can be identified in advance, it makes it easier for individuals to be prepared when they occur. Therefore, young footballers (and their parents) should be supported through education programmes from an early age to ensure they have the flexibility to adapt their career path in the likelihood that they will not become professional footballers (Bourke, 2002). In addition to this, transitional career fields such as professional football academies need to be viewed as locations to build career capital rather than linear steps to reach their final destination, that is, first team football. Ryan who was with a professional football club at the time of the individual interview explains his fear of getting rejected and having to move home to Ireland:

- Interviewer: What worries you?
- Ryan: Failing. Failing definitely yeah.
- Interviewer: Can you define what you mean by failing.
- Ryan: Coming back home.
- Interviewer: And what's the biggest concern about that?
- Ryan: Just like you are coming back here [to Ireland] with nothing and everyone is just going to say, 'aw you failed over in England' and all that so…no like education so I come back home here, and I wouldn't know what to do to be honest. (Ryan – individual interview)

Noting Ryan's frustration, not only with the line of questioning but possibly his realisation that his options were limited if he did fail to make it as a footballer, a different line of questioning was adopted to examine his motivation to continue with his professional football development. Interestingly, this too related back to ensuring he did not fail in his pursuit to become a professional footballer:

- Interviewer: Ok then, what is your key motivation? Like why do you want to be a footballer? Why do you want to succeed or what is success?
- Ryan: Probably the fear of failing again. I just don't want to fail. Don't want to let everyone down.
- Interviewer: Who would everyone be?
- Ryan: Just my family and maybe a few mates like. (Ryan – individual interview)

Worrying about fear of failure is understandable when working in a precarious and fickle occupational field such as professional football (Roderick, 2006a). In fact, Ryan's worries were consistent with how Hugh and James felt about coming home to Ireland as they had also migrated to join professional football clubs:

- Hugh: …if I get released, I will have no money. I have no education…you know what I mean?
- Interviewer: Yeah so is that a constant burden or a constant fear?
- Hugh: It would always be in the back of my head yeah. I have another year left on my contract now and I am kind of already thinking 'oh what if I don't get another contract what am I going to do'? You know that's scary. (Hugh – individual interview)

- Interviewer: What's the biggest fear?
- James: Just like not making it really just coming back here and being like everyone else like...
- Interviewer: And…are you worried about what people think or are you worried about job prospects or what's the biggest concern that you have about coming home?
- James: Just like the lifestyle change really like. Going from being a footballer to coming home here and having to find a job and even what people think of you as well like…I am not going to say that it's an easy life [being a footballer] because it's far from that but it's like it's better than being down on your hands and knees being a labourer or something for five days a week. (James – individual interview)

Unfortunately for Hugh, James and Ryan they were all eventually released by the professional football clubs they had signed to as sixteen-year olds. Hugh, James and Ryan's comments are a reminder of the position young footballers find themselves in due to their limited power and the need to constantly manage their relationship with academy coaches and the many forces

which are active in the field of professional football (Hodkinson, 2008). Their common concerns highlight that they were aware of their limited career opportunities if a career in professional football did not materialise; with Hugh and Ryan mentioning their lack of education and James's noting the possibility of being a labourer rather than a skilled worker.

This suggests that when young footballers are released, they need to be adequately prepared and supported to engage with a new transitional career field that offers an alternative career path. However, the data in this research suggest that once young footballers enter the professional football environment at sixteen their horizons for action become even more focussed on a career as a professional footballer. Research completed by Parker (2000, p. 62) identified similar findings with young trainee footballers seeing a career as a professional footballer as an "occupational inevitability" dismissing academic education or post-career vocational training. Ironically, it is at this point in their career (as a trainee) when they are more likely to face rejection ending their hopes of a career as a professional footballer (Calvin, 2017).

For the participants who transitioned to a professional football club in the UK, an important factor was their change of achieved status (Merton, 1972). In this context, achieved status is their new social position, assigned to them because of their career progression to a professional football club. For these participants they are now considered 'footballers' from a career perspective and this new status (Brown & Potrac, 2009) is complicated by a preoccupation to maintain this acquired identity (Collinson, 2003). Interestingly, the change of career status as a 'footballer' did not change their emotional response with regard to their fear of failure but simply changed the context, as they now feared rejection from the professional football club. The complexity of the participants' situation is heightened further by the illusion that first team football was closer because they had migrated. In sociological terms, Bourdieu uses the term 'illusio' (1992, p. 66) to explain how individuals get "caught up in and by the game…and that the stakes created in and through the fact of playing are worth pursuing" (cited in Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002, p. 26).

The danger for young footballers who get caught up in the illusion due to their change of status is a narrowing of their horizons for action creating a disconnect between their notion of self and an alternative career outside of football (Coupland, 2015). This is because their existing career, in this case as a footballer, consumes their identity leaving little space to develop other parts of their lives (Roderick, 2003). This disconnect is likely to make rejection from the

professional football world even more difficult to take and is likely to cause a disruption to their identity (Sparkes, 1998) and a dislocating routine (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). This forced turning point may involve moving into a new transitional career field with little or no preparation (Brown & Potrac, 2009). Maintaining a connection with football is an obvious option such as joining a League of Ireland club however many of the participants in this study noted they had little knowledge or interest in this league. In addition to this, Bourke (2003, p. 412) noted that if a player is released and returns home "he is often labeled [*sic*] a failure and may find it difficult to resume his playing career". Moreover, moving from English football to Irish football is seen as a considerable loss of status which was explained by Dylan:

> "…if you turned around and said that you are going back to play in Ireland and you are going to sign for a big club...say Shamrock Rovers for example...every English person over there would think that's not good enough...they'd laugh at you and say you are not good enough. Basically, if you are not good enough to play football in England you shouldn't play football…it's kind of laughed upon, the Irish league…they perceive it as Sunday league football." (Dylan – individual interview)

Dylan's comment demonstrates how our concept of self can be influenced by the perceptions of others and what society considers as socially acceptable (Roderick, 2003). This is not limited to the football world and occurs in other fields such as education. For example, this happens annually in Ireland with Leaving Certificate students engaging in a points' race to gain admittance to what are considered to be elite third level institutions. Pursuing other options such as choosing to complete a Post Leaving Certificate course to develop vocational and technological skills to progress into the workforce or to go into further education and training, is often viewed by Irish society as a less prestigious route to follow. However, when developing our career options and deciding which transitional career field to access, careful consideration also needs to be given to the meritocratic ideology that "you can be who you want to be" (Collinson, 2003, p. 530). It is accepted that we have more discretion when choosing the direction of our career paths in the twenty-first century, however, access to certain occupations such as professional football, music, dance etc are restricted and limited to a select few. As a consequence, young Irish footballers believe that pursuing a career in professional football requires leaving Ireland including their family and friends.

Alex provides a different insight into how fear of failure continues even though he had refused several contract offers and had not migrated to a professional football club in the UK. Alex describes how complex it can be to have the necessary career capital and motivation to become a professional football yet being unable to connect these to the opportunities presented by the objective world, in this case, a possible contract with a professional football club. Two quotes will be used to highlight the complexity of Alex's decision, the first of which concerns his continued motivation to succeed as a professional footballer:

- Interviewer: So, what drives you then to succeed? What's your main motivation?
- Alex: Failure I suppose. Even just thinking of not being successful and…my family...thinking of my family and my grandad and stuff definitely motivates me.
- Interviewer: Why do you mention your family in particular?
- Alex: I don't know, I suppose they have always been there for me and everything they have done for me and...my dad bringing me all over the country and travelling all around with me. I suppose you kind of don't want to let him down or anything, you want to make him proud like…I know they [his family] always say like; 'no matter what, you are after achieving, we are all so proud' but for me I really haven't achieved half as much as I want yet. (Alex – individual interview)

There are two important points that we can examine from the comments made by Alex. The first is he has unfinished business and he is resolute on continuing to pursue a career in professional football. The second point is an example of a contradictory routine (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997), because there is an obvious sense of regret that he is not further on in his football development. Therefore, he may feel that he has missed his opportunity by not moving to England when he was sixteen. Alex was very honest throughout the individual interview particularly when asked about opportunities he received to move to a professional football club in the UK. For any young talented footballer, particularly an underage international, it is assumed their natural career path would be to accept a contract from a professional football club if it was forthcoming.

To explain this further, the researcher believes there is a distinction to be made between 'perceived' and 'actual' horizons for action. Assumptions may be made about what an individual's *perceived* horizons for action should be that are not in keeping with the person's *actual* horizons for action. This suggests that for young footballers their "lives do not just

belong to the individual in question but also to social expectation" (Brown & Potrac, 2009, p. 145). This is an important point because the *actual* horizons for action may not be understood fully by the individual themselves because they are embodied and emotionally driven. In Alex's case his career decision can be better understood using careership theory as it was context related whilst also highlighting his freedom to make his own decision (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997) which we can see in the following comments:

- Alex: Yeah well the day after I got back [from England], Burnley rang my dad and said; 'look, we want Alex, there's a three-year contract there. Two-year scholar and a year pro if he wants it we would be delighted to have him' and my dad said; 'look I'll talk to Alex' and I just sat there and said; 'I don't want to go, I just want to stay and finish school. It's not for me at the moment'. He said; 'grand'. I suppose he was a bit disappointed alright because after everything...all the training...it would have been a big deal but looking back now I'm kind of happy I done it like.
- Interviewer: Was it a hard decision though at the time?
- Alex: Definitely. Oh, it was a huge decision because I suppose you worked your whole life...to get a professional contract...[but]...I love being around here and... if you are good enough you are good enough like it doesn't matter what age you are. (Alex – individual interview)

The pressure Alex was under to sign with a professional football club in England is evident from the comment he made about his father's disappointment and to turn down this opportunity took great courage. Interestingly, even though Alex's motivation to succeed as a professional footballer was extremely high, it was not enough to fully control the decision-making process to migrate. In other words, he was not overcome by the pressure to leave Ireland, but it does highlight the continuous struggle between individual agency and the structural pressures individuals face. All of the other participants who were offered a professional contract abroad accepted them and Alex's refusal highlights the way in which career decisions are pragmatically rational rather than simply technically rational (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997; Hodkinson, 2008). This also demonstrates the subjective nature of career decisions as defined by the individual themselves and by refusing such an opportunity, it highlights the unpredictability of career decisions (Ball, Maguire & Macrae, 2000). This is a significant finding because it illustrates the complexity of the career decision-making process and the importance of context, personal choice and individual agency.

Careership theory is ideally placed to help understand the career decision-making process because of the central role of pragmatic rationality which implies that decisions are; embodied in nature, based on partial information from people we trust, the decision involves several people and a person's ability to influence their career is subject to their position in the field and the resources available to them (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Importantly, Hodkinson (2008) notes that even though there is significant interaction with others and a variety of forces at play within the field, each individual takes an active part in their decisions, with sufficient power to refuse opportunities when presented. This was clearly the case for Alex.

7.2 The role of family in football advancement

Career advancement in certain professions may require a person to move away from their home country (Bourke, 2002, 2003), the reasons for which vary and at times are complex (Share, Tovey & Corcoran, 2003). An example of this can be seen in the medical profession in Ireland with newly qualified doctors and nurses seeking employment abroad rather than staying in Ireland (Humphries, Brugha & McGee, 2008; MacNamee, 2017; O'Regan, 2017). For professional athletes, moving in and out of countries is considered a relatively normal practice particularly with the global nature of specific sports such as tennis, golf, show jumping, swimming, athletics and football to name but a few (Botelho & Agergaard, 2011; Elliott & Weedon, 2011; Weedon, 2012; Roderick, 2013). However, for young athletes entering what Côté (1999) refers to as the investment stage of their sports development (sixteen years of age plus), migration may be the only option available due to the lack of specialised training in their own country.

The decision to move to a professional football club in the UK is for an Irish player understandable due to its close proximity and similarities in culture and language. It is also logical, rational and pragmatic when we take account of the facilities on offer, the standard of football and the economic incentives (McGovern, 2000; Bourke, 2002, 2003; Roderick, 2013; Curran, 2015a). However, before any migration takes place, it is evident that football plays a significant role in creating a unique bond between the participants and their parents. This is developed through the support and commitment parents offered such as travelling together to training and matches and the advice they provided concerning their football development. From

a very early age Liam's father critically evaluated his performances which acted as a source of deflation and inspiration for Liam:

- Liam: …when I was only young, he would let me know if I had a bad game and he pushes me on kind of. Some days you would come home when you were younger, and you would be nearly crying after, you scored two goals and you are 'Da I scored twice I played well'. 'You should have scored three times'. That kind of thing.
- Interviewer: How did that make you feel then?
- Liam: At the time, you do feel brutal but then again you think to yourself 'I could have scored three goals'. 'I will score three goals the next time'. So, he won't be shouting at me. (Liam – individual interview)

Liam's attachment to his father has shaped his engagement with and commitment to football. Churchland (2011, p. 8) suggests that our attachment to family members, can cause a conflict to exist between the "needs of self and the needs of others". This perhaps highlights an attempt by parents to live their lives vicariously through their child and to have idealistic expectations (Calvin, 2017). Coakley (2006) suggests that society contributes to this problem as modern-day sports have now become sites through which father's parent their children (Coakley, 2009). However, in spite of, or perhaps because of his constant critique of Liam's footballing performances, Liam identified his dad as the most influential person in his life:

> "I would have to say my Dad. He would come to every training session, every game. He doesn't drive but he would find a way for me to get to training or matches. He wouldn't let up on me. Always, not giving me a hard time but pushing me further than most parents would push their kids and there is a lot of people, good players who I have played with who have, I think one of them is in jail, so it just shows like when you are pushed to do something constantly and when you are not…you can be led astray. Especially in [local town], [this is] not the greatest of places." (Liam – individual interview)

It is accepted that society has changed the perception of what it is for fathers to parent their children (Pitchford, 2007b). However, Liam provides a deeper understanding of why he accepts his father's behaviour to push him "further than most parents would". We get a sense of his father's commitment to ensuring his son maximises his talent. Liam's parents are factory

workers and it is possible that football represents an attractive alternative career path. Consequently, the dedication and interest Liam's father shows in his son's football development demonstrates his recognition that success as a professional footballer can possibly provide upward mobility (Botelho & Agergaard, 2011). Intriguingly, it also demonstrates the adaptability of a parent's habitus (Ritzer, 1992) because Liam's father recognises that there may be limited career opportunities for his son due to the situation they find themselves in. Therefore, it is evident Liam's father is using the possibility of a career in professional football to broaden Liam's horizons for action.

Noah also identified his father as the most influential person in his life because of the support and guidance he gave him in football:

> "I don't think I would be where I am without him…he helps me with everything. He talks me through stuff and he knows the game well, so I always come to him about stuff." (Noah – individual interview)

Other participants also identified their fathers as the most influential people in their lives for the same reason:

> "My dad would definitely have to be one of the biggest influences because he was always kind of there helping me with my decisions and stuff…" (Alex – individual interview)

> "Probably my dad purely because I spend so much time around him to do with football and school and stuff." (Mark – individual interview)

> "My Dad is probably the biggest influence because he was the most involved in my football. Everything he says to me is advice really. He advised me through the decisions I have made and…I think just everything that he does, it helps me throughout football…he is the one that drives me. He is the one that comes to my training, to my matches. He talks to the coaches, he talks to the scouts, he, like he is really involved like he wants the best for me because it's what I want so he will do anything he can to help me." (Aiden – individual interview)

Interestingly, if the participant's mother was involved in their football career development rather than their father, their mother was identified as the most important person in their life. This is significant in our understanding of career development and why we gravitate towards individuals particularly those who facilitate our future self (Hart, 2014b; Coupland, 2015):

> "My mum has done loads for me. She's obviously took me to football since I was a kid, all over the country. I've always wanted to make her proud of what I've done. She says she is, but you always want to do more. Like you always want to make her happy. You want to go over [to England] and achieve as much as you can so hopefully she doesn't have to work as hard as she does." (Dylan – individual interview)

> "I reckon me Mam. My Mam is definitely my biggest [influence]. She has always been there for me. She didn't work so she is always here. She is always here for me so. She just tells me like I can't do any more than my best really and that's it really. She would be the biggest." (Hugh – individual interview)

James referred to the influence of both parents:

> "My parents definitely. They have just always been there like…whatever I wanted I got, whether it was football boots, if I wanted to go to a summer camp or anything like that and they were just like, if I wanted to be a footballer, they were happy. If I wanted to stay at home, they were happy. They just wanted what was good for me." (James – individual interview)

Family process variables, namely family support and parental expectations (Whiston & Keller, 2004), were clearly visible in the findings of this research. The participants' parents played a critical role in overcoming structural constraints by providing transport to attend training and matches and arranging and facilitating the move from their local club (Coakley & White, 1992; Lalor, De Róiste & Devlin, 2007). The commitment and investment of parents (emotional, time, travel and finance) to support their child's football development also appeared to strengthen the bonds between participants' and their parents as well as strengthening the participants' sense of obligation to pursue professional football as a future career (Poole et al., 1991). It also strengthened their fear of failure as they saw this as letting family members down. As Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000, p. 72) suggest - "young people carry the hopes and

aspirations of their family with them and these are thoroughly invested in their thinking and decision-making".

7.3 Living without family and friends

Although participants identified parents as the most important and influential people in their lives, it appears football advancement often requires living away from them. So while the bond between the participants and their parents was strong, the prestige and economic incentives in football are captivating and play a role influencing the decision to migrate. For example, the English Premier League is the highest paid football league in the world in terms of players' salaries (Harris, 2017). However, reaching the pinnacle of first team football in a league such as the Premiership, presents many turning points and transitions as players adjust to a new social and cultural environment (Bourke, 2002, 2003; Weedon, 2012). This is very evident from speaking to the participants in this research especially when they discuss how inadequately prepared they were for the transition particularly leaving their family and friends, as James explains:

- James: Like the hardest sacrifice? Definitely leaving family and leaving home like that is definitely number one.
- Interviewer: And what do you miss most about it?
- James: Just the simple little things like Ma's cooking and the fire and things like that, on cold winter's nights sitting in front of the fire watching telly. Just little stupid things really. (James – individual interview)

James's reference to "little stupid things" is interesting because it is the small things that define our memories of family life, such as watching specific television programmes together, traditional meals on specific days, birthdays etc. The ritualised and habitual aspects of family life provide reassurance and familiarity and transitioning away from these can be difficult initially, particularly at a young age (Bourke, 2002; Curran, 2015b):

- Interviewer: …so how difficult was it leaving your friends and family? Can you describe that to me at all?
- James: I'd give that a nine or ten out of ten really. That's how hard it was. It was very hard but kind of once I got used to it over there, I love it now like. Absolutely love it...

- Interviewer: And what was hard about leaving at the time, can you explain that to me?
- James: Just leaving like your family like. My Mam will probably kill me for saying this, but she sobbed like a baby when I left first so...that was probably the hardest part. Just because she was crying and just things like that like you know. (James – individual interview)

Recounting the experience of leaving home was clearly difficult for James and in this short exchange it was interesting to see how on two occasions he attempted to distance himself from this negative experience. The first example of this can be seen in his effort to clarify that he 'loves it *now*' (emphasis added). This indicates his transition to the professional football environment (or transitional career field) may have been a testing experience for him requiring time to adjust to his new surroundings (Kelly, 2014). Secondly, rather than talk specifically about his own feelings at the time of the migration, he uses his mother to mirror how challenging this time was.

Anticipating difficulties with the migration experience, Ryan's family stayed in the UK with him for his first week in an attempt to support his transition. This is not surprising as Ryan found it difficult to be away from home during trials which, was a relatively short timeframe compared to moving from the family home on a permanent basis.

> "My family came over with me for a week…we all flew together to England [but] I had to say goodbye to [them] after like a week so…[that] was really hard." (Ryan – individual interview)

Similar to James the final separation was noted by Ryan as "really hard". Some participants felt that the adjustment period could take up to four months.

A number of the participants provided an interesting snapshot into their daily living arrangements following their migration. Although the common theme among the participants was the comparison of their living conditions abroad to the life they had with their family in Ireland, they also had their own individual issues to overcome. For example, Liam noted that his shy disposition and lack of confidence restricted his ability to mix with others compounding the difficult reality of being away from his family and friends:

> “Moving away for the first time was the worst thing honestly. The worst thing I have ever done because you are so used to just being around [family and friends]. Going out when you want to, out to your friends to being in a room all the time. You don't have to be in a room all the time but for me, I am, as I said I am shy, so I would have been just minding my own business not really talking to anybody for the first maybe month or two. Trying to get my head around like that I am not going to be home for a while…worrying about stuff like 'what's going to happen with my friends, will I still have friends when I go home’?” (Liam – individual interview)

Liam’s comments describing the first couple of months of his migration are exceptionally revealing, particularly when he stated it was “the worst thing I have ever done”. This is important because the lives of footballers are generally portrayed in a positive light and it is rare to get an insight into a players’ life where they reveal their true feelings rather than the obligation to present the dramaturgical self (Kelly, 2014). In Liam’s case he was very open about the effect migration had on him personally which manifested itself in isolation and insecurity.

Hugh and Jack also provided interesting insights with both of them focusing on what their family home offered, specifically freedom, the lack of pressure (Hugh) and being able to relax without having to display a façade (Jack):

- Hugh: Living away from home is the hardest part definitely. I deal with it well but it's tough.
- Interviewer: What do you miss about being with the family?
- Hugh: My house, just kind of freedom like. The freedom of just not having pressure on you. I am here now [at home]; I have no pressure to do anything. I can go to the gym; I can go to the beach. I have no one kind of on top of me you know. I remember at first, I had a girlfriend and that was tough. Like being away from her and then I kind of broke up with her and it got easier. It got a lot easier. (Hugh – individual interview)

> “I just missed being relaxed at home…when you are with people you don't know, you have to be polite, you have to, you know there is so many things you have to do. You never really feel relaxed and at home it's just easy you know. When you get home that's exactly what it's like. You get home, just your own bed and things like that it is, it's a big deal. It's a much bigger deal than what you think like.” (Jack – individual interview)

Hugh's comments illustrate that when young footballers migrate, they may find it more difficult to compartmentalise their lives with football dominating the context of every decision they make ranging from having a girlfriend to going to the gym. Jack was unable to fully relax and be himself, demonstrating how exhausting it can be for young footballers even when they are away from the professional football academy. Goffman (1959, p. 70) argues that individuals perform for observers in what he labels the front region but in the back region, "the performer can relax; he can drop his front, forgo speaking his lines, and step out of character". For Jack, his family home in Ireland provided the back region affording him the freedom to relax and enjoy home comforts such as his own bed. However, once he returned to England, every aspect of his life is consumed by having to put on a performance, both on and off the football pitch (Bourke, 2003).

Friends were also identified as a significant element in the participants' social network offering an additional layer of emotional support and sense of belonging (Lalor, De Róiste & Devlin, 2007). What is particularly interesting in the following comments is the strong sense of loyalty the participants who migrated had towards their friends in Ireland. This suggests two important points; friends remained an important link to the old life they had left behind in Ireland and the new environment they lived in was transient, individualistic and lacked a real sense of trust (Calvin, 2017). Although not explicitly stated, the participants also understood their status as a footballer had changed their identity because of their transition to a professional football club and therefore they were very guarded in terms of who they allowed to access their social network:

- Interviewer: And you have mentioned a few times about having close friends. Is that important to you?
- Ryan: It is now because people are trying to be your friend, but they are just kind of like, they are not really your friend. I just have a close circle.
- Interviewer: How do they do that? The people from outside? How were they trying to be your friend...?
- Ryan: I don't know they just think you are going to be like a super star, so they are just trying to be your friend really. (Ryan – individual interview)

"Like my friends are my friends and I wouldn't go off with other people because I was playing football. My friends are my friends and I have stayed with them. That still hasn't

changed like, I wouldn't turn into anything like that. I have had friends since I was a kid. I have had friends since I moved into the primary school and I still have them now like…I like to have close friends…to have people to come back to and know that they are my friends and they don't only want me for football...” (Liam – individual interview)

Liam and Ryan’s comments illustrate the importance of being liked by their friends because of who they are rather than because of their profession. It is also interesting to see Liam reciprocating this loyalty by not going “off with other people”. The creation of a barrier due to a lack of trust could however contribute to the participants’ sense of isolation and while it may strengthen their relationship with their existing friends in Ireland, it may contribute to what Adler and Adler (1989) refer to as further ‘role engulfment’. In this instance role engulfment occurs when young players only focus on their football development rather than other social opportunities to grow as a person such as meeting new people and cultures. In fact, research completed by Cresswell and Eklund (2006) on elite rugby union players found that players who did not engage with activities outside of the sport were at risk of burnout resulting in physical and emotional exhaustion, reduced accomplishment or low professional efficacy and sport devaluation.

Noah, James and Jack all acknowledged that sacrifices were necessary due to their geographic location, particularly sacrifices relating to social interaction with their family and friends. This was rationalised because they were in England for a specific purpose, to enhance their career as a professional footballer:

- Noah: Like the laugh and the joke you have with your friends like it wouldn't be the same over…in England...
- Interviewer: Yeah and are you envious of [your friends] at all...?
- Noah: Yeah when they are like going out somewhere partying or something, I wish I was there, but you just have to let it go and just say 'I am here for a reason I am going to do it'. (Noah – individual interview)

“You have to go, leave your family, leave your friends. You can't really do things what normal teenagers can do really like…but that doesn't really affect me really…because there is plenty of time for partying like. Once my career is finished there is plenty of time to do all that I think.” (James – individual interview)

> "Yeah you sacrifice being at home, friends, family and stuff like that but if that's a sacrifice you are willing to make to get to where you want to get, it's what you have to do and that's the way I see it you know. A sacrifice isn't a sacrifice if it's what you need to do to get to where you want to go." (Jack – individual interview)

The participants were so focused on their aspiration to become professional footballers; they were willing to sacrifice what James referred to as being "a normal teenager". The life their friends were living was not seen as particularly important and activities like partying were something that they were willing to sacrifice, in light of the bigger picture which is becoming a professional footballer. This finding is consistent with research completed by Brown and Potrac (2009, p. 149) who found that "the educational and social sacrifices that the participants made served to push them into well-defined and narrowly based roles as footballers". It is this context that shapes their horizons for action and anything that might inhibit their career path is carefully positioned on the periphery.

The data in this section highlights a number of important personal issues in the process of migration to a professional football club. The first concerns the safety and comfort the participants' family homes provided, compared to the obligation to abide by rules, values and specific behaviour in the professional football world (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Gearing, 1999; Bourke, 2003; McGillivray, Fern & McIntosh, 2005; Hodkinson, 2008; Kelly, 2014). The second factor concerns their displacement of friends and family from their social network. Interestingly, Patrick et al. (1999) identified the role of the family and home environment as a key element for children and adolescents to develop their talent in sport and the arts. It can certainly be argued that joining a professional football club heightened the participants' status or identity as footballers (Brown & Potrac, 2009), however, it also stripped them of the physical connection to their family at a very intense phase in their career and more importantly in their personal development (Lalor, De Róiste & Devlin, 2007). To manage this displacement, the participants referenced their reliance on social media to remain in constant contact with friends and family through telephone calls and video-calling (Botelho & Agergaard, 2011).

Being away from family and friends can leave young players with little to focus on other than football, which in turn strengthens their resolve to succeed as professional footballers risking the construction of one-dimensional identity. Lalor, De Róiste and Devlin (2007, p. 79) argue that excessive involvement in specific social worlds "may be detrimental, inhibiting

development in other social worlds". This one-dimensional identity can develop when our career defines who we are (Brown & Potrac, 2009) or begins to seep into other aspects of our lives constraining our horizons for action by limiting what we see (Hodkinson, 2008). As we track the participants' early introduction to football and their progression through the three stages of Jean Côté's developmental model of sports participation (1999), we can see an increase in their football identity and status. This becomes more profound for the participants during the investment years particularly the participants who migrated to professional football academies in the UK.

It is accepted that there will be some overlap between football and other aspects of life but having an element of separation from each social world "enhances a young person's resilience or ability to cope with disruption and difficulties in another social world" (Lalor, De Róiste & Devlin, 2007, p. 78). With the participants so heavily invested, both physically and emotionally in a career that is unlikely to materialise, the risk of disruption is highly likely (Sparkes, 2000; Sparkes & Smith, 2002). For example, it is suggested that dealing with a disruption such as being released from a professional football club will be an extremely distressing experience (Brown & Potrac, 2009; Blakelock, 2014). In fact, Blakelock, Chen and Prescott (2016, p. 60) suggest "young adolescent players may be at risk [of] developing psychological distress following deselection". This is because the social world of professional football constructs a reality that places football development at its centre whilst permeating all other aspects of young players' lives. The significance of this point illustrates the importance of supported transition during a young talented footballers pre-leaving stage, their transition in the UK and following deselection (Scanlon & Doyle, 2018).

7.4 Migration

Structurally, the career path to become a professional footballer is similar to that of any other profession. All companies need staff with a specific set of skills, a process of selection occurs, a contract is signed with a new staff member and work begins. However, there are very few businesses similar in size and with the annual turnover of professional football clubs, who recruit children from the ages of fifteen or sixteen or as young as thirteen in Noah's case. There are other examples outside of football where children have moved from Ireland to pursue a career, such as Gearóid Solan who in 2015 as a fifteen-year-old was offered a place at the

prestigious Royal Ballet senior school in London (Kelly, 2015). However, in the general context these examples are rare.

Pursuing any career will inevitably comprise of turning points that are structural (determined by external systems), self-initiated (agentic) or forced (external events), all of which give rise to different experiences of transition (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Therefore, for young Irish footballers considering making the transition to move abroad, it is vital that adequate information is provided prior to migration and the adjustment to their new environment is adequately supported. This information should be provided at an early stage of young Irish footballer's career continuing until they reach the age of sixteen, the time they are allowed to move abroad (structural turning point). The objective is not to change their career choice, but it may help to enlighten the decision-making process. This should broaden their horizons for action by being fully informed about the positive and negative expectations that accompany migration at a young age (Schlossberg, 1981). It would also help to prepare support networks, such as family and friends, for the challenges of a transition to a professional football club in the UK. The findings of this research suggest that the decision to leave home at a young age to pursue a career as a professional footballer is often based on a sound assessment of two key elements; seizing an opportunity (Bourke, 2003) and the structural deficiencies which exist in Ireland to provide a full-time career in professional football (Curran, 2015a). However, dealing with issues such as loneliness and being homesick are very rarely considered in advance of leaving Ireland (Woods, Buckley & Kirrane, 2005).

When the decision is made to move to a professional football club, in many ways the transition is similar to the experiences of students leaving home to pursue third level education (Patiniotis & Holdsworth, 2005). In many respects the physical environment plays a significant role in the adjustment to life away from home. Recognising this, Article 19 (2) (b) (iii) of the FIFA RSTP (2018, p. 22) provides that if a player is transferred at the age of sixteen or seventeen, a professional football club must look after them "in the best possible way (optimum living standards with a host family or in club accommodation…". Although the participants did not mention the standard of accommodation as an issue, they did note a sense of physical isolation and social detachment from their host families. Liam, Jack and Ryan explained how challenging this time was for them, which was a difficult part of the interviews as they all became visibly upset:

"I was staying in digs out in the middle of nowhere and I had nowhere to go and I was constantly on the phone [to my family] really upset like having nothing to do and bored like. There were two other lads that were there, but they were never there really. They were always going home…coming back for a day or two, going away again. I had nobody like I was just sitting there by myself… So, we would get out of training, be home for about half four, five o'clock and then that was it really. Just nothing to do. Nowhere to go. That's the worst part…You are just sitting in your room or sit downstairs watching telly. That's it you are in for the night then really." (Liam – individual interview)

Liam clearly describes the isolation and loneliness that can be experienced by young players who migrate (Woods, Buckley & Kirrane, 2005). Interestingly, the professional football environment, although pressurised, provided the participants with a confirmatory routine and a sense of purpose (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). However, once their day is finished in the football academy, Liam highlights a section of the day that is absent from academic discourse and we can see the participants moving from a confirmatory routine (in the academy) to a contradictory routine (in their accommodation) every day. This makes the transition confusing, particularly if supports are inadequate. Feelings of boredom, isolation and seclusion were also described by Ryan and Jack:

- Interviewer: Ok. So, in terms of free time then, you just mentioned that you had a bit of free time in the evenings. How much free time do you have from football...?
- Ryan: In digs there is so much free time it's a joke. I would go on Netflix and I have an XBox in my room but like most of the time you would be just staring at the wall...it's really boring like it's proper hard. (Ryan – individual interview)

"Jack: When I was over there it was crap. I was homesick. I was in digs with a family…you don't know them…I was frustrated over there because on the weekends a lot of the lads would leave the digs and go home, and it would just be me…like, picture a young lad in a house with a family he doesn't really know and like you really feel like I can't really go down and sit in the sitting room because that is where they are. They are watching TV and they are watching what they want. So, I am going to stay up in my room and watch Netflix or something like that and it's not a good environment to be in. You feel like you are stuck in a closet like…That's why I came back [home].

> There was the education and then there was the loneliness of the lads [I lived with] going back [home]. Like you are good mates with them, but you can't rely on them to look after you. You can't be saying to them like 'listen can I come back with you to your house?' You can do that a few weekends grand, but you can't be doing that every weekend. It does get lonely because there is no one over there and the digs people that I was with were lovely like. They tried to treat me as one of the family, but you know you are not." (Jack – individual interview)

Liam, Ryan and Jack's comments highlight that the absence of family and friends particularly at a young age can have a negative impact on how one copes within a new social setting. Even Jack's experience of being treated like "one of the family" was not sufficient to meet needs that would ordinarily be catered for by his own family. This may be related to a mismatch between the new environment and an individual's social and cultural capital, underpinned and affirmed in the family home and by friends (Patiniotis & Holdsworth, 2005). The absence of a sense of belonging, protection and emotional support it is argued is a contributing factor of the loneliness young Irish footballers' experience.

When young players are immersed in the professional football environment there is an expectation to be strong, competitive and dominant (Denham 2009; Kelly, 2014), particularly in a hyper-masculine workplace (Parker, 1996; Kelly & Waddington, 2006; McGillivray, 2006; Platts, 2009; Platts & Smith, 2018). Maintaining this performance is critical with Giulianotti (2005, p. 104) suggesting that modern day professional athletes are controlled through the life they are obliged to lead which is constantly being examined for physical flaws and "character defects". Therefore, for young Irish footballers, maintaining the perception that they are mentally strong and equipped to deal with the challenges of professional football is crucial. For some participants this resulted in concealing their true feelings when they were experiencing loneliness and homesickness:

- Interviewer: Why wouldn't you have talked to anybody in the club about being [homesick]?
- Ryan: I just thought like if I told them I thought I'd feel weak and all that, so I never really told them…if I told the manager [he might] say 'oh he is not up for it' so I just kept myself to myself really…[I] just thought they would think I was weak like mentally as well. (Ryan – individual interview)

Through the use of careership theory we can see Ryan's actions are socially and culturally situated as he attempts to protect his position in the field of professional football by portraying a hyper-masculine identity (Roderick, 2006c; Kelly, 2014; Platts & Smith, 2018). Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) suggest that how we act, behave and make decisions is based on how we interpret our position in society. In Ryan's case, this demonstrates how he performed for observers in what Goffman (1959, p. 66) refers to as the "front region". Displays of emotional strength and resilience were also described by Noah:

- Interviewer: Would you have spoken to the coaches in [the Premier League club] about being a little bit homesick?
- Noah: Yeah. Well the welfare officer I would have spoken to, he would have known. He would have said if you are ever homesick, we will send you home it's alright like.
- Interviewer: Would you have ever done that?
- Noah: Once or twice but not often, not often no not really.
- Interviewer: Why wouldn't you have done it?
- Noah: Because you need to just stay there and just be strong and get used to it…[and] just thinking like what the manager would be thinking 'does this kid really want it'? So that's why I didn't do it and I do really want it, so I stayed and kept going. (Noah – individual interview)

It is worth noting that even though Noah had been immersed in the professional football environment from the age of thirteen (due to the arrangement he had in place to travel over to England to train with a professional football club), he still found being away from the family home on a permanent basis at sixteen very difficult. His mentality to remain 'strong' embodies the culture of professional football which is deeply entrenched in maintaining what is perceived to be a macho workplace identity (Roderick, 2006a; Kelly, 2014; Platts & Smith, 2018). Hugh also tried to conceal his struggles:

> "I would have spoken to my coach one or two times…but I wouldn't say it to him too many times like because he would be like 'Jesus like he is really struggling'. Like I wouldn't like to ring any alarm bells for them, but I more or less kept it to myself and got through it..." (Hugh – individual interview)

It is interesting to see that both Noah and Hugh spoke to someone in their professional football clubs (welfare officer or coach) but only once or twice. They did not want to draw attention to

the fact they were struggling. This was also reflected in comments made by James who felt that showing weakness would be exploited by others:

- Interviewer: And would you have felt you could speak to somebody over in [the professional football club]? Was that an option for you?
- James: Kind of, em, like at the time it was just kind of like a dog eat dog world over there, but I think now I would definitely be able to speak to somebody.
- Interviewer: And why do you think you couldn't speak to somebody in the first phase?
- James: I probably could have…but it was just kind of my way of thinking that 'I won't say anything I will just get on with it' like...Because I think in football if you show a sign of weakness then people will just jump on that.
- Interviewer: Ok and what do you mean by that? What would be the fear for you?
- James: Just like people thinking that you are kind of like a pushover and things like that and I think you have to kind of make your mark once you go in. That you are here, you are not here just to mess around like that you are here to improve. (James – individual interview)

James's comments are similar to Jack's description of the trial process which he described as hostile to new entrants. This is because new entrants present a possible threat of displacement to established players and as a consequence, the introduction to the football academy system required assertive and aggressive navigation to establish a position in a highly competitive milieu. Understanding why Ryan, Noah, Hugh and James rejected the notion of seeking help within the professional football environment is a significant finding for two key reasons. In the first instance, it highlights the symbolism ascribed to showing emotional weakness within the professional football environment. Secondly, it displays the power imbalance that exists between player and coach, who is seen as the gatekeeper to their future career (Cushion & Jones, 2006; Kelly & Waddington, 2006; Roderick, 2006a; Kelly, 2010; Platts, 2012).

In professional football, it could be argued young players' voices are mobilised through the EWO, a role commenced in English football academies in 1998 (Pitchford, 2007c) and also provided in Scottish football academies (McGillivray & McIntosh, 2006). The EWO is a full-time position and they are tasked with assisting young players with any welfare issues and support for their academic education and career planning (Platts & Smith, 2009; Platts, 2012). For young Irish footballers who migrate to the UK, the provision of this role is critical to assist

them with the transition from their home country and with balancing a dual career. However, the participants in this research who were with professional football clubs had mixed experiences of the EWO. They either did not know who this person was, or they felt they were unable to speak to them during a difficult period for fear that it might get back to their coach. The EWO was seen as part of the fabric of the professional football club rather than an independent confidant (Platts, 2012). Therefore, any sign of weakness, such as loneliness or homesickness had to be minimised and managed by the participants themselves.

Interestingly, the provision of a UK Welfare Officer for Irish footballers based in the UK has been in existence since December 2008 and was officially launched by the then Minister for Foreign Affairs, Micheál Martin TD, and the FAI Chief Executive, John Delaney (FAI, 2012). At the official launch of this new position, it was reported by the Irish Examiner newspaper that the joint funded role by the Irish government and the FAI would cost €100,000, with the Minister noting:

> This officer would fill a number of roles, providing ongoing guidance and support to footballers and their parents, and working progressively with clubs and relevant agencies to ensure players' welfare and education needs are addressed. (FAI, 2012, p. 2)

This role continues to exist and in 2013, it was reported that the FAI received forty-two thousand euro from the Department of Foreign Affairs (Murphy, 2015). Intriguingly however, none of the participants in this study ever referenced meeting the UK Welfare Officer. In fact, the individuals who are paid to fulfil this function are regularly referred to as English based football 'scouts' (Fallon, 2017) rather than welfare officers. It is apparent that the function of these 'welfare officers' is to monitor the performance of players on the pitch rather than off it. It is therefore unfortunate that although structures are evidently in place to support young Irish players within the professional football system and through the FAI, the support they need during difficult times is left to family and friends.

7.5 Preparing for a career after football

The reason there is such a strong emphasis on dual careers for talented athletes is because only a select few will make a living out of professional sport (Amara et al., 2004; Aquilina, 2009; European Commission, 2012; López de Subijana, Barriopedro & Conde, 2015), particularly

professional football (Brettschneider, 1999; Calvin, 2017). Research completed on five hundred players from the Republic of Ireland who migrated to English league football between 1945 until 1995 found that the average professional football career for these players was six and a half years (Curran & Kelly, 2018). This illustrates that even if the 'dream' is achieved, a career as a professional footballer is brief (Houlston, 1984; Bourke, 2002; McGillivray, Fern & McIntosh, 2005; Andersson & Barker-Ruchti, 2018). This is even more important for young footballers, many of whom will never reach the first team with a professional football club (Parker, 1996; Roderick, 2003; Calvin, 2017). Platts and Smith (2009) argue that although the White Paper on Sport places importance on tackling the abuse of young footballers and protecting their welfare, the sub-culture that exists in football clubs prevents this from happening. Christensen and Sørensen (2009) suggest that when young football players integrate into a club environment, they are taught the attitudes, values and norms of the club. Parker's (2000) research in a professional football club identified a sub-culture that viewed engagement with academic education and post-career planning as an acceptance of occupational failure.

As previously discussed, our choices are based on our individual subjective preferences and are also embodied and enriched by our cultural and social surroundings (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997; Light & Kirk, 2000; Hodkinson, 2008). However, social structures and cultural traditions also impose social rules (Hutchison, 2010) and in specific examples such as sport they can cultivate and develop a dominant way to act and behave (Light & Kirk, 2000; Bourke, 2003; Wright, MacDonald & Groom, 2003; McGillivray, Fern & McIntosh, 2005; Parker, 2006; Christensen & Sørensen, 2009). With this in mind, it is fascinating to examine the increasing polarisation of young footballer's attitude to their academic education as they get closer to the dream of becoming a professional footballer (Platts & Smith, 2018). For young talented Irish players, this process begins during what Côté (1999) refers to as the sampling stage and peaks during the investment stage of their football development, particularly when they migrate to the professional football environment. Jack, who had been with a professional football club in England but returned to Ireland to complete his Leaving Certificate sums up the attitude of young footballers towards their education when immersed in the professional football environment:

> "When you are over there it's a bubble. When you are in there every day it's all you think about. The be all and end all is progressing and doing well and hoping to get

> another contract…I don't know what it is, it's just a mindset over there. It's just no one seems to think ahead… Like there are not many people telling you like you need a plan B...” (Jack – individual interview)

Jacks comments are interesting because this narrow view will inevitably have a significant impact on young footballer's future career if they are released from a professional football club. This is important because Gearing (1999, p. 50) notes that footballer's life choices are severely constrained by “their late entry into the labour market and lack of training for an occupation outside the world of football”. The interview with Jack, who confirmed he returned home to complete his Leaving Certificate, and interviews with six other participants (Dylan, Max, Ryan, Hugh, James and Liam) will be used to examine their level of preparation for an alternative career should their career in professional football end. This information is particularly interesting because at the time of the individual interviews in 2015 only one of the players (Dylan) had been released. The remaining five players were all released within three years of their individual interviews.

Dylan was eighteen years old at the time of the individual interview and had just been released by the professional football club he was signed to in England at sixteen years of age. This was a particularly difficult interview as Dylan was effectively unemployed with no substantial qualifications:

> “…at the minute whenever I've come home I never thought about my next source of income or the next way I'm going to get paid. How I'm going to sustain a car, how I'm going to keep things going but then this football club came up [possible contract with a club in Northern Ireland]. This has been my priority, my main focus and that's all I've thought about. That's all I've wanted to do so I'm waiting now until I get…things tied up [but] because this football is part-time, I'm going to look into education as soon as possible after that.” (Dylan – individual interview)

Dylan's comment demonstrates the limited options available to him due to his preoccupation with succeeding as a professional footballer, which has led to “the loss of a future orientation and long-term planning” (Brown & Potrac, 2009, p. 150). It did not appear that the education Dylan had received with the professional football club to provide him with alternative career

options, had prepared him for a transition into a career outside of the football world. Therefore, it is not surprising that he reverted back to rebuilding his career capital as a footballer:

> "We done a BTEC in Sporting Excellence… There were no exams, there was nothing, there was no pressure on you. If you didn't have it finished, you didn't have it finished...I think I can only get into college in Northern Ireland or Britain but I'm not sure what it's setting me up for in the Republic...obviously because I only have my Junior Cert here...I'd have to do some other exams first before I can go [to college]." (Dylan – individual interview)

Dylan did eventually enter third level education to study sport and he was involved with the college football team, however he dropped out of his course before completing his studies. With regard to his football career, at the beginning of the 2018 League of Ireland season, Dylan was registered with a League of Ireland club but was failing to make any first team appearances.

As previously mentioned, the interviews undertaken with Max, Ryan, Hugh, Liam and James were completed when they were registered players with professional football clubs in the UK. During the focus group with the under seventeen players, sixteen-year-old Max had already signed with a Premier League football club. However, at nineteen years of age and having never played first team professional football, he was seen as surplus to requirements with the Premier league club. Max could have returned home to Ireland but instead he decided to move on a free transfer to join the development squad of a Championship club (tier two in English football).

It is not surprising that Max did not return home after he was released by the Premier League club because during the focus group, he stated that; "The last thing you'd want to do is come back". This, as Bourke (2003) noted, may be associated with the label of failing as a footballer in England and/or the difficulty of rebuilding a football career back in Ireland. However, after a year with the Championship club, Max was loaned out to a non-league club which is the fifth tier in English football (Premier League being tier one). Loaning out young players to non-league clubs is not uncommon as it is often used by higher tiered clubs to test a young player in terms of their resolve or to implicitly indicate to them that they are longer wanted at the club. Eventually in January 2018, Max's contract with the Championship club was terminated and

he subsequently joined a League of Ireland club to rebuild his football career and arguably his life.

Having failed to 'make the grade' by not playing first team professional football, young players like Max who return to Ireland are not afforded any special status to access career opportunities in Ireland outside of football. Furthermore, there is no institutional support to assist these young players with their transition when they return home (Schlossberg, 1981). Therefore, with only his Junior Certificate from the Irish education system, it is not surprising that Max decided to rebuild his career capital in football with a League of Ireland club. However, due to the limited opportunities to earn a full-time income from football in Ireland, it is likely that Max will have to seek employment outside of football which may prove difficult due to his limited qualifications. Max's career journey is an example of the unpredictably and complex nature of professional football and the necessity to maintain a dual career.

During the under sixteen focus group, Ryan also stated that if he was released by a professional football club he would not move home to Ireland but would prefer to move down the leagues in England. Ryan spent almost five years with the professional football club he had signed to as a sixteen-year-old; however, having failed to make any first team appearances, at twenty years of age he was granted an early termination of his contract. Instead of moving down the English league system like Max, Ryan immediately returned home to play in the League of Ireland in January 2018. In a similar position to Max, Ryan will also have to examine his career options outside of football and therefore the following piece of dialogue is remarkably insightful as he explained the education he completed with the Premier League club. It is important to remember he had not been released at this point in his football career:

- Ryan: When we were doing our scholarship, we had college like one and a half days a week…I don't know what we did like BTEC is it? Is that what it's called? Yeah, we did a BTEC…over the two years.
- Interviewer: And what qualifications did you get out of that?
- Ryan: I haven't a clue to be honest. I don't know much about it really…it was like, it was always something to do with sports and it was like diet and all that.
- Interviewer: And is that something you always wanted to study, or do you have interests in other areas?

- Ryan: I was interested in it but like I wouldn't choose it if I had to. (Ryan – individual interview)

This piece of dialogue with Ryan is particularly revealing and was very similar to James in terms of his nonchalant approach to the course he was doing or how it prepared him for a career after football (Platts & Smith, 2018). The researcher was interested to know if anyone in the club had sat down with Ryan to prepare him for a career if he was released. Ryan confirmed that this never happened and as he was offered a full professional contract after his scholar contract had expired, this made him even more focused on reaching first team football. Yet again, the contract served as a confirmatory routine, reinforcing his identity as a footballer whilst constraining his horizons for action for an alternative career after football. Once released from his contract with the professional football club in England, Ryan used the League of Ireland as a transitional career field to get back to England. In fact, having signed with a League of Ireland club in January 2018, within eight months Ryan had moved on loan to an English fifth tier club. From speaking to Ryan during the focus group and individual interview, it was evident he had little interest in pursuing an academic route to facilitate a dual career and this is evidenced in his decision to continue pursuing professional football as a career.

Hugh, who was an all honours student at Junior Certificate level in secondary school, like Ryan disengaged from education as soon as his compulsory education finished at the professional football club in England:

> "At first when I went over…I had my education in the morning and in the afternoon so I kind of thought 'yeah I am alright now'. But when I finished my education I just kind of thought 'no I just want to play football'. 'I want to do my best at football and see where that gets me, and I'll worry about the education afterwards'." (Hugh – individual interview)

Hugh was released by the professional football club in 2016 and in terms of his football career he has since played for three different League of Ireland clubs (up to the 2018 League of Ireland season). During the individual interview it was interesting to see if the education he received during his time with the professional club was any different to the other participants:

- Hugh: We done a BTEC…It was kind of like sports, anatomy, human anatomy and just coaching and stuff like that. It was all to do with sports…
- Interviewer: So what qualification did you get...?
  Hugh: I think it could get me into a college. I am not sure though. It's like BTEC level three or something. I don't know what it is. I haven't got a clue. Hopefully it's alright… (Hugh – individual interview)

Hugh had clearly succumbed to a laissez-faire attitude towards education within the professional football environment which is also reflected in the following comments from James:

- Interviewer: And what qualification then would you get once you finish that?
- James: I think the education officer was saying that if I did get released and I had to come home like that I would be able to get into a top college over here [in Ireland] …
- Interviewer: …in terms of [your] career once you finish [the education] piece in [the professional football club] do you have any idea what you could be qualified as?
- James: Not really no. I'm sure if you asked they would be able to [tell you] but I am not really sure to be fair. (James – individual interview)

Having been released by his professional football club in May 2018, James faces a new set of decisions concerning his career as he also confirmed that he completed a level three BTEC qualification in sports. The poor advice he received from the EWO in the professional football club is an indication of a lack of understanding of the Irish education system as his qualification will not allow him direct entry into third level education in Ireland. With only his Junior Certificate, he will now have limited options in Ireland if seeking employment outside of the football environment. However, it was confirmed in November 2018 that James had joined a League of Ireland club for the 2019 season.

The standard of education the participants received in the English professional football system was narrowly focused on a BTEC qualification in sport. BTEC qualification are vocational qualifications offered in England and Wales to prepare individuals to join the workforce (BTEC, 2018) and are similar to Post Leaving Certificate qualifications in Ireland. Although this satisfies Article 19 (2) (b) (ii) of the FIFA RSTP (2018), the evidence in this research suggests that it fails to provide Irish players who are released with a career other than football.

As previously mentioned, Liam struggled with school from primary school right through to his Junior Certificate before he left to join a professional football club. Therefore, if Liam was to engage with education whilst abroad it would have to have been in a supportive environment and relevant to him. However, this was not the case which he explains:

- Liam: We had a school programme, so we done school every Wednesday for the whole year apart from maybe some days I would have a game on a Wednesday…It starts at nine o'clock until three o'clock. We do English all day…
- Interviewer: And did you not get a choice as to what course you wanted to do?
- Liam: No, not really. It was just kind of that's what the year group before done. That's what they said, the Principal said that's what he thinks gives you a good qualification, so I never really got an option on what I wanted to do…
- Interviewer: And what qualification do you get out of it or?
- Liam: Aw I couldn't, I don't know. (Liam – individual interview)

Liam explained that a lot of the young players did not want to attend school, and this created a negative atmosphere. He explained that the only reason he attended school was because of his mother and father who wanted him to get some form of education. However, Liam was never fully engaged in the process of a dual career because he felt he hadn't the skills to do anything else other than football:

- Liam: I know I should have a plan B but I am not thinking about that at the minute.
- Interviewer: Why not?
- Liam: I don't know. I know I should be, but I just don't think I am really good at anything so... (Liam – individual interview)

In 2017, aged nineteen with only his Junior Certificate completed in the Irish system, Liam was released by the professional football club. Following his return to Ireland Liam joined the FAI/Education and Training Board programme (FAI/ETB), originally the FAI/FÁS Programme. This programme offers educational and football development to talented footballers and was the same course Alex used to progress to third level education. In an interview with a national newspaper in December 2017, Liam admitted that he had sacrificed his education by moving away and as he had no qualifications to fall back on, he was using the FAI/ETB course to assist him in this regard. Liam also indicated that he was looking to join a

League of Ireland team. Having failed to do so, in March 2018 he moved to a club in the United States who participate in a member-driven national league rather than a league affiliated to the United States Soccer Federation.

The evidence from the participants indicates that their focus was on their football career as opposed to a dual career which is consistent with findings from other research that also examined education, careers and the professional football environment (Parker 1996, 2000, 2001, 2006; Gearing, 1999; Bourke, 2002, 2003; McGillivray, Fern & McIntosh 2005; McGillivray, 2006; McGillivray & McIntosh, 2006; Christensen & Sørensen, 2009; Platts & Smith 2009, 2018; Platts, 2012). With such a strong focus on academic achievement in society, particularly in Ireland, the participants' moderate focus on their education could be considered as risky behaviour. However, "what is risky to some may be a rational means of pleasure, escapism, garnering status, self-esteem, enhancement, sensation-seeking or a combination of these to others" (Lalor, De Róiste & Devlin, 2007, p. 116). This is a particularly interesting point because the data in this research suggest that pursuing a career path to become a professional footballer was not seen by the participants as a risk. In fact, it was seen as a rite-de-passage which simply required other aspects of their lives to receive less attention, or none at all (Stead & Maguire, 2000).

7.6 Summary

When young players leave Ireland to join professional football clubs, it creates a collision course with their subjective hopes for a career as a professional football and the objective reality which they do not seem to be prepared for. Although a number of the participants mentioned having a difficult relationship with some coaches, generally, their new life in the professional football environment provided everything they had hoped for in terms of their football development. It was their life off the pitch which caused them the greatest difficulty. The participants' fear of failure was entangled with their struggle to deal with life without their family and friends. Both factors (fear of failure and life off the pitch) focused their horizons for action in such a way that it positioned everything else in their life, apart from a career in professional football, on the periphery. For example, by limiting their development of new relationships (due to a lack of trust) they increased their risk of becoming engulfed in their identity as a footballer. In fact, Lalor, De Róiste and Devlin (2007) suggest that moving away from home during late adolescence provides access to new social worlds and should present

new opportunities to meet new people. Whilst maintaining their relationships with their existing friends, expanding their social network should have provided new experiences reducing the intense focus on developing their football career and identity.

The data from the participants also demonstrated that the professional football environment engulfed every aspect of their lives creating pressure to perform off the pitch as well as on it (Coupland, 2015). For footballers, the context of their football career shapes their daily decision-making process such as what to eat or drink, when to rest, when to exercise, how to exercise and when they could go home to Ireland. It could be argued that the life the participants sought through professional football prior to leaving Ireland did not match the reality of the situation they were immersed in. In fact, their lives were even more restricted than family life in Ireland.

The participants appreciated the freedom home life provided and home was seen as escapism from the professional football world. During periods of loneliness and isolation, it is critical young Irish footballers, who are as young as sixteen, are supported and provided with the appropriate channels to allow their voice to be heard. This is particularly important as the culture and structure of professional football appears to promote expression on the pitch rather than off it. Finally, the data suggest that following our passion does create certain risks (Newport, 2016); however, for the participants their horizons for action were positioned in such a way that the risk was almost invisible to them. This suggests that a structure is needed in the football environment to fill the information gap which would assist young footballers to broaden their horizons for action before and during the migration to a new transitional career field providing a balanced view of the world which promotes a dual career. With the strong possibility of not making it as a full-time professional footballer support is also needed to assist young players in their transition back to Ireland (Woods, Buckley & Kirrane, 2005).

Chapter 8 - Discussion and Recommendations

8.0 Introduction

This study makes an important contribution to understanding the career decision-making process of Irish underage international footballers. For the researcher, it was particularly important to ensure that this study provided a platform that allowed the voice of the participants to be heard. Therefore, this study harnessed the voice of the participants to understand how they interpreted *their* social reality as they pursued a career to become a professional footballer. It is acknowledged that young football players have the power to make their own career decisions, yet no-one has ever documented the individual career journey of Irish underage international footballers using a longitudinal approach. Over the period of this study, the participants faced many challenges, yet they continued to maintain a career path that they considered would achieve their ultimate career goal - to play full-time professional football.

To document the career decision-making process of Irish underage international footballers, the data collection process was carefully considered, and the application of a pragmatic methodology produced rich qualitative data to analyse. The analysis of this study generated four principle chapters that are used to plot the complexity of the participants career journeys. Therefore, this chapter will provide a brief summary of the key findings from each of the analysis chapters and set out recommendations that might support young footballers in their career decision-making process in the future. The final section will outline the limitations of this research and areas of further research that could expand on this study.

8.1 The Beginning of Career Formation

The first research question sought to examine how social and cultural factors influence the career decision-making process to become a professional footballer. It also wanted to investigate who was central to facilitating this process. A significant finding in chapter four identified that not only were career decisions socially and culturally bounded, but this process began from a very early age for the participants. Interestingly, the simple fact that a parent introduced their child to a sport such as football or supported them during the different phases of their football development is undoubtedly linked to how our culture ascribes value and in turn social validation. Careership theory helps us to understand career decisions because it places significant importance on the context, acknowledging that career decisions encompass

the individual, their culture and their family (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997; Hodkinson, 2008). This research clearly found that parents facilitate a career path that would ordinarily not have been possible. This was demonstrated by the support they offered the participants in decision-making and the significant time commitment they invested bringing them to and from training and matches.

An individual's career decision-making is undoubtedly shaped by family background, as well as the broader context of their lives, such as geographic location and individual life history (school, sport, peers, abilities) (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Therefore, the country or society we are born into and our family background play a significant role in our socialisation, the shaping of our habitus including our horizons for action. Analysing the career decision-making of Irish underage international footballers through the lens of careership theory played a significant role highlighting this point. A central argument of careership theory is that career decisions are pragmatic rather than systematic. This was evidenced in the research as the participants explained that from an early age, they realised they had a talent for football. As a consequence, many of the participants decided to move from their local club due to its limitations and to maximise the potential they possessed (Andersson & Barker-Ruchti, 2018). This was verification that their increased career capital required a change in the field, instigated by a change in their habitus and horizons for action.

8.2 Playing the Fields

The second research question looked to investigate how Irish underage international footballers interact with the football environment to advance their career progression. To answer this question, chapter five focused on how the participants positioned themselves in the football world. This was an important section of the research because it illustrates how career decisions are pragmatically rational due to the relationship between individual agency and social structure. For example, career decisions were being made by the participants to strategically place themselves in the football 'shop window'. An interesting point identified by many of the participants was the lure of the DDSL, noting it was an important league to play in if they were going to get spotted by scouts to go on trials. This highlighted the importance of the football scout because they had a significant influence on the career path of young footballers. It was interesting to see football scouts use a range of techniques to get the attention of the participants

such as approaching them directly after games or giving their business card to parents, even though this is strictly prohibited in accordance with the FAI Scouting Regulations (2011).

Furthermore, this research identified a number of entry points the participants used to gain access to the professional football world. For example, they used their schoolboy club to transition to a county/league representative team and the Kennedy Cup, the FAI ETP was used to transition to international football and trials with professional football clubs were used to transition to the UK on a full-time basis at sixteen. All of these events can be categorised by a new concept developed in this research called transitional career field. A transitional career field is defined as an event that is recognised objectively as a meaningful 'opportunity' to build career capital to improve an individual's chance of reaching their career destination, whilst having a multi-layered subjective interpretation. This is an important concept for young footballers, their parents, coaches and football policy makers to understand because it is essential that the discourse in football changes to prevent transitions from being viewed as guaranteed linear steps to become a professional footballer. For example, having completed two friendlies in November 2018, the international head coach for the under fifteens stated, "it's a huge stepping stone for these players in their career" (FAI, 2018e). Critically, this research demonstrates that although playing for the under fifteen international team is an incredible experience and proud moment, it cannot be considered as a stepping stone to further international appearances or a career in professional football.

Turning points are critical in our understanding of the career decision-making process if applied correctly. According to careership theory, turning points involve a transformation of identity (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997) and two significant structural turning points were discussed in chapter five. Specifically, these included turning fourteen which enabled young talented Irish footballers to go on trial with a professional football club in the UK and secondly turning sixteen allowed players to officially leave Ireland to migrate to sign a contract with a professional football club. The significance of going on trial reinforced the participants resolve to become professional footballers because of the facilities professional football clubs could offer as they approached the investment stage of their football development (Côté, 1999). However, it is important to recognise the evidence presented in this research which suggests that parents have little knowledge of how the trial process works by placing considerable trust in scouts. The trial process requires better management to ensure young footballers are

protected and although the FAI Scouting Regulations are in place, they do not appear to be effective and should be strengthened in this regard.

8.3 Combining Football and School

The third research question looked to examine the role of education in the occupational career choice of Irish underage international footballers. In addition to this, the research attempted to identify how a dual career path could be supported. This research is unique, because its longitudinal focus provided the opportunity to speak to underage international footballers during their junior cycle and senior cycle programme in secondary school. It also included a review of the education received by the participants' who migrated to professional football clubs in the UK. Focusing on specific periods in the participants' lives, provides a unique insight into how they attempt to balance their football development and academic education relative to the context of their lives. The first section of chapter six examined the participants relationship with their Junior Certificate. Interestingly, findings identified a polarisation of the two institutions which played a central role in the lives of the participants, namely school and football. The commencement of the under thirteen national league in March 2019 (FAI, 2018f) gives this finding even greater significance. This is because the absence of an integrated approach with underage football and the education system is an obvious missing piece in the holistic jig-saw.

As previously mentioned, attending trials had a significant impact on crystallising the participants' decision to choose professional football as a career, however for those who signed a pre-contract with a professional football club before the age of sixteen, it clearly had a negative effect on their relationship with their academic education. The irony is that the participants who migrated had to continue their education compared to the participants who remained in Ireland whose compulsory education ended. However, the participants who did remain in Ireland also continued with their secondary education even though there was no legal obligation to do so. The participants spoke of the significant demands of secondary school and of the inflexibility of the school timetables and structures. It is important to note that the Junior Cycle has been reviewed since the participants attended secondary school and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is currently undertaking a review of Senior Cycle. It is too early in the review process to suggest that there might be structural changes to the implementation of Senior Cycle. However, a more flexible and/or modularised delivery of

Senior Cycle, could certainly benefit young talented footballers, or indeed any student who would like to take a more flexible and nonlinear journey to school completion.

Another key finding identified in chapter six was the lack of connection the participants had with their secondary school. Primary school experiences were characterised by a sense of freedom and an emphasis on sport and play time. However, the significance of school sport did not continue as the participants' transitioned to secondary school which is intriguing given the fact that they were at the time some of the best footballers at their age level in Ireland. From the findings, it is argued that this detachment is caused by two crucial factors; firstly, school's football is not considered as a tool to build career capital to become a professional footballer. Secondly, if football played no significant role in the participants secondary school experience, then there was a lack of social validation in this setting and therefore a lack of connection. These two points are significant because they can intensify the disconnect between young footballers and the secondary school they attend between the ages of fourteen and sixteen which are focused specifically on advancing their career as a professional footballer.

It was interesting to see that even playing international football at schools level did not hold the same cultural importance for the participants' when compared to their involvement with the official FAI underage international teams. It is argued that if there was an increase in the status of schools' football in a similar way to schools' rugby in Ireland, it could be used as a vehicle to develop players and their academic education concurrently. Therefore, schools football could be used by scouts to assess players rather than the existing system that involves young players having to miss school to attend trials in the UK, sometimes for extended periods. However, presently, schools football lies outside of the structure of Irish football for career construction purposes, which highlights how the participants' decisions are pragmatically rational because it is not considered within their horizons for action. Although it may be challenging, if young talented footballers attended schools that matched their football horizons for action, it could create a stronger affinity to the school and as a consequence their academic development.

In the FAI's strategic plan (2016-2020), one of its strategic goals is to "grow the partnerships between Third Level institutions and Education Training Boards and National League clubs" (FAI, 2016c, p. 29). This strategic goal is recognition that the FAI see the benefits of a union with third level institutions, Education Training Boards and football. From this research, the

next piece of this jig-saw from 2020-2024 has to incorporate a link between the FAI, underage national league clubs and secondary schools. The aim should be to implement a similar model already in place to support young footballers in countries such as Sweden (Andersson & Barker-Ruchti, 2018) who began addressing the issue of a dual career for young athletes as early as 1965 (Metsä-Tokila, 2002).

8.4 The Process of Migration: A Necessary Evil?

The fourth research question considered if young Irish talented footballers who migrate to a professional football club were supported during their school-work transition and what supports are necessary to support a successful transition. It is evident in this research that the recruitment of young Irish children by professional football clubs in the UK is now part of the fabric of Irish schoolboy football. If a young talented footballer in Ireland is meeting all of the developmental markers such as being selected to play in the Kennedy Cup, the FAI ETP or underage international football, it is inevitable they will be contacted by a scout. Before migration takes place, a significant finding was the role football played in forming a unique bond between the participants and at least one of their parents, particularly if they were involved in their football development.

The participants were explicit in their appreciation and understanding of the commitment their parent(s) had made in providing support to develop their football career. In fact, the participants identified their parent(s) as the most important person in their lives (Ward et al., 2007). This is significant because is challenges the belief that during adolescence this is the most difficult period for the parent-child relationship. It also challenges a finding by Bourke (2002) who found that parents have little influence on the career choice of their children in Irish football. Ironically however, this close bond made the transition to the UK a more difficult experience. This was evident when the participants explained the difficulty of adjusting to life without their family and friends. However, this also increased their resolve to succeed as a professional footballer as they wanted to make their family proud. Therefore, the fear of failure was a significant motivating factor with young footballers risking the construction of a one-dimensional identity. The lack of support when the participants' migrated was pervasive even though, in theory, the support structures were in place through EWO's in professional football clubs and the provision of a UK Welfare Officer by the FAI.

Chapter seven also examined the experiences of players who migrated to a professional football club in the UK. This is where we see a structural separation of the participants in terms of their career paths. For the participants who remained in Ireland, they still continued to pursue professional football as their primary career choice. However, the evidence suggested a largely untold reality for young Irish footballers who migrate, with many struggling with homesickness, isolation and loneliness. Similar to findings identified in two separate pieces of Irish research completed by Bourke (2002) and Woods, Buckley and Kirrane (2005), it is critical young talented Irish players are prepared for the transition to the UK to join a professional football club. Poignantly, it was the cut-throat pressurised professional football environment that offered the participants solace and affirmation that their decision to migrate was the right one (confirmatory routine). This was identified as the correct decision because it surpassed the participants expectations in terms of pitches, facilities, football equipment and coaching.

The absence of family, friends and one could argue the secondary school in Ireland removed a routine the participants were accustomed to which was impossible to replicate in a different country. This created what careership theory refers to as a contradictory routine which interestingly, seemed to strengthen their resolve to make it as a professional footballer. It is obvious that young players making this complex transition need to be supported as they face a daily struggle with their decision to migrate. In addition to this, the education they received whilst with the professional football club did not provide them with the necessary qualification(s) to transition easily back into Irish society when they were released.

8.5 Recommendations

The structure of Irish football is overseen by the FAI and it presents many opportunities for young talented footballers to develop and progress their career pathways to become professional footballers. However, young talented Irish footballers will face many transitional career fields, routines and turning points, particularly between the age of fourteen and nineteen. As previously mentioned, key structural turning points occur during this period of their football career, beginning with their introduction to the professional football environment through trials in the UK at fourteen, international football at fifteen and possibly migration at sixteen. Having reviewed all of the evidence identified in this research, including literature from other researchers and principally the voice of the participants detailed and analysed in this thesis, the following recommendations are being made. It is important to note that the primary

recommendation being made, if implemented, would support the additional recommendations identified in this research.

Primary Recommendation

1. The FAI should appoint a Head of Education and Welfare whose primary responsibility would be to implement a national programme that would support talented footballers between the age of thirteen and nineteen. Using the principles of supported transitions developed by Scanlon and Doyle (2018), the key functions of the Head of Education and Welfare would be as follows:

(a) Develop a network of Education and Welfare Officers to work in underage national league clubs. This would require devising appropriate training to ensure they have the skills needed to support children to manage their football development and academic education. This new role would support the voice of the child, support parents and liaise with head teachers in the secondary school the child attends. On-going support would be provided by the FAI Head of Education and Welfare including quarterly meetings and on-going CPD training.

(b) Develop a training programme that can be delivered by national league Education and Welfare Officers to young footballers and their parents advising them of the various career transitions they are likely to face and how they can be both supported during this process. This training could be used to satisfy one of the strategic goals in the FAI existing Strategic Plan (2016-2020) which states that they want to "develop a consistent approach on Parent Education to help them understand the philosophy behind player development, its aims, goals and objectives" (FAI, 2016c, p. 25). This training should begin when young players join a club at under thirteen national league level. This training should continue on a yearly basis as players progress through the underage national league structure commencing with under thirteen moving to under fifteen, seventeen and nineteen level.

(c) Implement a structured training programme commencing at under fifteen international level which provides underage international players with information, planning and advice that they will need prior to migration. Ideally, this training programme should include former players who would have had similar experiences. This would also

include information on the support structure they can utilise such as the FAI UK Welfare Officers, the FAI Head of Education and Welfare (based in Dublin) and the professional football clubs Head of Education and Welfare in the UK. These players should also be advised to join the Professional Footballers' Association, the players union in England, if they migrate, to ensure they receive appropriate support on deselection or retirement from professional football. This costs £20 per season and can include the following benefits; education funding, football coaching courses, physical rehab, legal advice, wellbeing support and counselling, among others (PFA, 2018).

(d) Develop links with the Head of Education and Welfare in the professional football clubs' that Irish players migrate to. This would ensure an open system of communication is in place if a young Irish player is experiencing any problems. This system of communication would also be used to assist a player if they get released by a professional football club. The FAI's Head of Education and Welfare would be notified, providing an opportunity to offer institutional support in the form of guidance on career, education and football options.

(e) Receive quarterly reports from the FAI Welfare Officer based in the UK. This should include clear details regarding the support they have provided young Irish footballers based in the UK and any issue they may have been identified. A standardised report form should be developed to ensure the consistency of reports completed is of a high standard.

Additional Recommendations

2. Although the FAI Scouting Regulations suggest times across the calendar year that trials can take place, it is recommended that young players should be limited to a maximum of four trials a year that, in the current secondary school structure, should ideally take place during school holidays. Only one trial should be attended in each of the four allocated periods that include: (1) Easter Mid-Term (2) July (3) August (4) October Mid-Term. The child should only be away from their home a maximum of three days during one of these allocated periods including travel. If scouts wish to view players outside of these dates, then they should attend fixtures in Ireland as they have the resources and the time to do so. As per the FAI Scouting Regulations, scouts should only deal with the club the player is registered with in Ireland. It is recommended that

a memorandum of understanding should be agreed between the FAI, the Football Association and the Scottish Football Association to strengthen the enforceability of these regulations. The is because scouts who work in the jurisdiction of the FAI for professional football clubs based in the UK are affiliated to either the Football Association and the Scottish Football Association.

3. Due to the young age players go on trials, it is particularly important to explain the process to them to ensure they are prepared for the positives and more importantly the negatives of this experience. This is the first time young Irish players will encounter the professional football environment and it is important their expectations are managed and not based on their view of professional football from the television or other media platforms. It is also important that young players are not influenced or manipulated by the ancillary benefits professional clubs provide whilst on a trial. This information should be provided to young players by the underage national league clubs they are registered with through the EWO.

4. In light of child abuse investigations in Ireland which include but are not limited to, the Ferns Report (2005), the Ryan Report (2009), the Murphy (Dublin) Report (2009), the Cloyne Report (2011) and notably in sport, the Murphy Swimming Inquiry (1998), as well as revelations in 2017 of child abuse in English football, consideration needs to be given to the freedom and ease with which scouts are bestowed the role of loco parentis when young players go on trial. At the very least, the FAI Scouting Regulations should specifically detail how children should be cared for when attending trials abroad. It is strongly recommended that no child under sixteen should attend a trial outside of the Republic of Ireland without their parent/guardian or a person appointed by them. This 'appointed person' must complete child protection training and be required to have completed a police check in the jurisdiction they reside. This recommendation should be incorporated into the FAI Scouting Regulations and presented at parent information evenings in underage national league clubs.

5. A percentage of all training compensation payments made to schoolboy clubs should be set aside to support young players transition back into education or the workforce if they are deselected before the age of eighteen. Due to the large training compensation payments available to Irish schoolboy clubs, a percentage of the training compensation

fee should be allocated to a new ‘Education & Welfare Transition Fund’ managed by the FAI.

8.6 Limitations and Future Research

Attempting to capture the voice of such a unique group in Irish society was a particularly difficult undertaking because getting access to this cohort of players was restricted due to time constraints. Being such a focused study had its benefits, but it reduced the number of young players who could participate in the study. This was exacerbated by the limited time Irish underage international players meet during the calendar year and the time provided by the underage international coach to speak to the players. In addition to this, the research had to be captured at specific times in the participants life course to provide an accurate reflection of their lives at particular points in time rather than only relying on retrospective data. Having a focused cohort did provide the opportunity to investigate the participants lives in a comprehensive way that was simply not possible to achieve with a larger group, the reasons for which are detailed in chapter three.

Another limitation was the selection of the participants for the focus group interviews because it involved the opinion of the first team coach for each age category. This selection was a non-probability sampling method but was in a sense opportunistic due to the longitudinal nature of the study. It was necessary to select individuals from the questionnaire sample that were going to be called up in the next underage international squad and the international head coach knew who these players were likely to be. The researcher could have interviewed seven individuals in each of the focus groups (twenty-one players in total). However as only sixty-minutes had been allocated by the international head coach, four participants was deemed suitable to ensure everyone received adequate time to contribute.

It has been acknowledged that the focus group interviews provided interesting data. However, as a data collection method, the researcher would only use focus groups again with young participants in a setting such as a club team or students who knew each other in a classroom setting. On reflection, some of the participants in this research only knew each other through their involvement with the underage international team and because they do not meet often enough, this may have made the setting more difficult to express themselves. This setting did not provide the environment to allow the participants the freedom or confidence to challenge

each other. Thankfully, the individual interviews addressed this issue and allowed for triangulation at the analysis stage of the research.

A significant theme that emerged from this research which certainly merits further study is the role of parents in the career development of Irish underage international footballers. Understanding the reasons parents invest so heavily in their children's football career would be invaluable. Their perception of their child's career journey in football would help to identify the sacrifices parents make and what supports could be offered to them. Furthermore, speaking to parents would provide a significant contribution to research to discover if one child's commitment to pursue a career as a professional footballer impacts on their family life including relationships with other family members such as their partner and other children if applicable.

As all of the participants who remained in Ireland struggled balancing the demands of the Leaving Certificate, research should be completed to examine how young footballers could complete it over a three-year period as opposed to the existing rigid two years. This would be an integrated model as it would incorporate the Leaving Certificate whilst increasing the amount of football contact hours with expert coaches. The model would use transition year as year one, fifth year as year two and sixth year as year three. This piece of research could also examine how rugby is converged with specific secondary schools in Ireland and how this has created a culture of high academic achievement as well as the foundation from which young talented rugby players progress to the professional game. This would have to factor in that professionalism in rugby generally commences after young talented rugby players have completed their Leaving Certificate as opposed to the Junior Certificate for footballers.

A separate piece of research (or integrated with the previous point) could be undertaken to examine the expansion of the one-year FAI/ETB programme to a three-year course that would include the Leaving Certificate programme. Young talented footballers could possibly leave their existing school after the Junior Certificate to engage in a full-time football/education programme in one of the ten FAI/ETB locations across the country. This research would have to examine the economic viability of such a proposal and if there was an appetite among key stakeholders in Irish football including the children themselves. Finally, with the improvement of structures in women's football in Ireland and significant increases in young girls

participating in the game, a comparative study could be undertaken to analyse the career decision-making of female underage international footballers.

8.7 Concluding remarks

The improvement in facilities such as stadia and pitches, the increase in salaries and the global interest generated through the media have contributed to the popularisation of professional football making it attractive and highly sought-after career by many, particularly young boys and girls. It is in the interest of multinational corporations to keep children interested in football as it generates significant income for them. However, within this complex web, individual voices in football often go unheard such as children who maintain its very existence. Therefore, it is the role of academic research to shine a light on specific phenomenon that may not ordinarily be discussed or understood. The experiences of Irish underage international footballers and their journeys to become professional footballers is an excellent example of this and the researcher was passionate about providing the participants with a platform to do so.

As explained from the outset, I faced difficulties during my Leaving Certificate year, living an existence that appeared normal to a seventeen-year-old – training and playing matches six to seven days a week. However, having no-one to say stop at this point in my life has created a desire to help other children find their voice in a world that is constantly telling them what is good for them. Having worked in education and in football, it is deeply frustrating to see how society restricts the opportunities children have to tell their story. From government ministers, to performance directors, principals, teachers and coaches, they all play an important role assisting children to develop. However, as they get caught up in achieving targets, the needs of the individual child and their voice can get lost. Successful coaches are glorified for the trophies they have won and the teams they have cultivated but at what cost? It is obvious that parents are caught in a difficult position as they attempt to support their child through a very demanding period in their football and academic life, emotionally, physically and psychologically. This is even more difficult when two institutions demand such high standards and a significant commitment without understanding the holistic development of the child. An interesting piece of Irish research completed by Hannan and Ó Riain identified the transition to adulthood as a sociological and culturally defining moment:

> …youth may be a time of freedom and self-indulgence in some ways…[but] it is a highly structured and regulated experience and…success or failure in early transitions…affect the course of adult lives in very important ways… (Hannan & Ó Riain, 1993, p. 237)

What I have learned on this research journey, personally and professionally, is life is a constant balancing act and there are always going to be challenges. However, having the right support structure can make our life course that little bit more manageable. Finally, having retired from Gaelic games in November 2017 to complete this PhD, it might be time to dust off the boots for one more year!

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Appendix 1

DCU Ethics Approval Letter

Dublin City University
Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath

DCU

Dr. Majella McSharry
School of Education Studies

25th July 2011

REC Reference: DCUREC/2011/064

Proposal Title: **The welfare and life-long academic pathway of Irish soccer players and their continuous professional development**

Applicants: Dr. Majella McSharry, Mr. Vincent O'Flaherty

Dear Majella,

Further to expedited review, the DCU Research Ethics Committee approves this research proposal. Materials used to recruit participants should note that ethical approval for this project has been obtained from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee. Should substantial modifications to the research protocol be required at a later stage, a further submission should be made to the REC.

Yours sincerely,

DCU
Office of the Vice-President for Research

Dónal O'Mathúna

Dr. Donal O'Mathuna
Chair
DCU Research Ethics Committee

Questionnaire – Republic of Ireland International Football Team

Personal Details

Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Current Age: _____

Country of Birth: _____

County you live in: _____

Club name: _____

Regular Playing Position: _____

Participant – Please complete all of the following questions.

Instructions - Tick Yes or No or fill in the section provided.

Please answer all Questions

Football Background

Question 1

What Schoolboy league do you play in? _____

Question 2

How many years have you played football? _____

Question 3

Including your current club how many Schoolboys' clubs have you played for? ☐

Question 4

How many International Caps do you have at the following levels below?

Under 15 Level ☐ Under 16 Level ☐ Under 17 Level ☐

Question 5

Who is your most important influence in football? Please tick one only.

Father ☐ Mother ☐

Another Family Member ☐ Teacher ☐

Other (Please State) ☐ _____

Question 6

Have you ever attended a trial in England?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Football Career

Question 7

What do you want to achieve in football to be considered successful?

_____

_____

_____

Question 8

Do you feel you require a Player Agent to progress in football?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Question 9

What do you think your chances are of becoming a professional footballer?

Unlikely ☐ Good chance ☐ Excellent chance ☐

Question 10

Do you feel you need to go to England to play Professional football as a career?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If Yes Why? _____

_____

Question 11

Would you like to play in the League of Ireland?

Yes ☐ No ☐

The Football Environment

Question 12

How many days a week (including weekends) do you train or play football matches? ☐

Question 13

As part of your football training do you

- Do weights Yes ☐ No ☐
- Have a specific diet Yes ☐ No ☐

Question 14

Have you ever suffered from bullying in football?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Question 15

Have you ever trained or played a football match while you were injured?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Question 16

How many separate teams do you play for including representative teams? ☐

Question 17

How would you describe a good coach/manager?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Question 18

Do you think Professional footballers are;

- Below Average Intelligence ☐
- Average Intelligence ☐
- Above Average Intelligence ☐

Home, School & Other Interests

Question 19

Currently living with: Mother ☐ Father ☐ Both ☐ Guardian(s) ☐

Question 20

What year are you in secondary school? _____

Question 21

If you had a choice would you;

- Complete the Leaving Certificate and then go to England to play football ☐
- Join an English club before completing Leaving Certificate ☐

Question 22

How difficult is it to manage school and football?

Not Difficult ☐ Difficult ☐ Very difficult ☐

Question 23

What type of student do you see yourself as?

Foundation level ☐ Pass ☐ Honours ☐

Question 24

How would you describe a good Teacher?

_____

_____

_____

Question 25

What type of school do you attend?

All Boys ☐ Boys & Girls ☐

Question 26

Does playing football have a negative effect on your schoolwork?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Question 27

If you do not become a Professional footballer what would you like to work at?

_____

_____

_____

Question 28

Which do you see as your priority or more important to you for your future?

School ☐ Football ☐

Question 29

Do you want to go to college?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If Yes, what would you like to study? _____

Question 30

Do your Parent(s)/Guardian(s) want you to go to college?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Question 31

What other sports do you play competitively?

_____

_____

Appendix 3

Interview Guide

Elite Sporting Environment

- Can you describe how you started playing football? (Where was it, with who, did you enjoy playing football in that way)
- Have you always watched football, travelled to football matches? What was that experience like? Who did you go with? How did you prepare for the trip?
- SEE BELOW PICTURE – Champions League Barcelona - Elite footballers – What do you think this picture means? How are the players advertised/presented?
- SEE BELOW PICTURE – Messi – What does he symbolise in football? (Advertising/sponsors/amount of people in the stadium/people buying jersey's – How invested they are in the game)
- Would you ever consider/have you considered moving to a league other than the UK to become a footballer? Why? (Would it make the transition easier?)
- How would you describe football in the UK (England/Scotland) to a person from another country?
- How would you describe Irish football to a person from another country?
- How are professional players in Ireland valued?
- Can you develop as a professional footballer in Ireland?
- When did you start playing as part of a team and why?
- Who encouraged you to join?
- When you started playing competitively how do you feel you were perceived by others/how did your skill level compare to others?
- What sports would you have played in the past and at what age did you start to specialise in football?
- When did you start to get recognised as a footballer? Can you give me some examples?
- Website - Newspaper cuttings – Did that make you and your family proud. Where are they kept?
- Have you ever felt you have outgrown the training or a coach in terms of your own development?

- Were you part of the Emerging Talent Programme? How was this different from training with your club or school?
- Could you describe a difficult relationship you've had with a coach and how you dealt with the situation?
- We talked about clubs you have played for in the past, was it necessary to move clubs? Why?
- How would you get noticed at a schoolboy club if you wanted to progress?

  Contacted – Did this happen to you. Can you explain what happened?
- How much were you involved in this process?
- What was your parent's role in the process?
- Can you describe what it is like to go on trials in the UK? (Who went? Where. What happened? Sense of pressure)
- What was a typical day like when you went on a trial?
- Can you describe how the club would have treated you? (Hotels, food/nutrition, pitches, gear)
- What happened after the trials?
- How does a scholar contract/agreement work?

  What was the agreement? Did you discuss the agreement with anyone and who made it? Was your club in Ireland involved in the agreement?
- How did you prepare for your move to Scotland/England?
- How do you/did you cope with moving away from your family?
- Can you describe how you felt in the first few days/weeks/months?
- Can you give examples of how the experience of living away from home has lived up to your expectations or not?
- How much free time do you have from football and what do you do with it?
- Did you ever participate in the Kennedy Cup? Can you describe the experience?
- What has been the most significant moment in your football career to date?

Education

- Can you describe the education you are currently engaged in? Course, topic.
- Why are you taking the course and what do you want to get from it? Did you always want to study….?
- What are your memories of primary school? Did you enjoy primary school?

- How did you get on with your teachers?
- Can you describe the transition from primary school to secondary school?
- Was it important for you to be involved in football in school? Why?
- Did your parents finish secondary school and what was there attitude to education?
- How did you get on in secondary school? What do you like and dislike? What would you change if you could?
- Would you have considered yourself a strong student academically in school? What made you think that (Ability Grouping)
- How would you describe the workload in secondary school? Has there been a time when it has been particularly busy for you?
- Does your family expect you to go to university? Why?
- How do you manage school and football? Describe how you manage or what was it like in Ireland?
- What would help to make it easier?
- Explain whether an academic education is important or not if you want to become a footballer?
- How would you describe the attitude to education in football particularly the other players and the coaches?
- Have you ever considered giving up football to concentrate on your education?
- Tell me when you have had to take time out of school because of football?
- You must have been/be so busy when you're away on international trips how do you get time for schoolwork? Would you have completed any school work when you were out of school?
- What do you want to work at when you are no longer playing football?
- Would you be interested in doing the Leaving Certificate in England?

Identity

- How do you think friends and family would describe you?
- Which would bother you most – under performing in an exam or in a match? Why?
- Who has been the biggest influence in your life and what's the best advice they have given you?
- How do you feel when you put on the Irish jersey? Are you proud to be Irish?
- Has anyone discussed with you, your options if you don't make it as a professional footballer?

- Who do you think is responsible for preparing you for a life after football?
- What worries you and what makes you happy?
- What interests do you have outside of football?
- Which is more demanding on you – Football or Education? (Is football mentally demanding?)
- Where do you see yourself in 10 years?
- What are your short-term plans? (Next 3-5 years)
- Have you ever considered giving up football?
- What drives you to succeed? Motivation.
- Can you explain how much commitment/investment is needed? Are there many sacrifices?
- Are you looking forward to going back to Scotland/England? Is it difficult going back having been home for the holidays?
- Can you describe your support structure, and do you feel you have full control over your future?

Questionnaire Descriptive Results

Questionnaire – Republic of Ireland International Football Team

Football Background

Question 5

Who is your most important influence in football? Please tick one only.

Father	65%
Mother	9%
Another Family Member	15%
Coach	11%

Question 6

Have you ever attended a trial in England?

Yes	71%
No	29%

Question 8

Do you feel you require a Player Agent to progress in football?

Yes	53%
No	47%

Football Career

Question 9

What do you think your chances are of becoming a professional footballer?

Unlikely	6%
Good	85%
Excellent	9%

Question 10

Do you feel you need to go to England to play Professional football as a career?

Yes	50%
No	50%

Question 11

Would you like to play in the League of Ireland?

Yes	50%
No	50%

Question 14

Have you ever suffered from bullying in football?

Yes	3%
No	97%

Question 15

Have you ever trained or played a football match while you were injured?

Yes	82%
No	18%

Question 18

Do you think Professional footballers are;

Below average Intelligence	6%
Average intelligence	88%
Above average Intelligence	6%

Home, School & Other Interests

Question 21

If you had a choice would you;

Complete the Leaving Certificate and then go to England to play football	24%
Join an English club before completing Leaving Certificate	76%

Question 22

How difficult is it to manage school and football?

Not Difficult	56%
Difficult	35%
Very Difficult	9%

Question 23

What type of student do you see yourself as?

Foundation	0
Pass	53%
Honours	47%

Question 26

Does playing football have a negative effect on your schoolwork?

Yes	18%
No	82%

Question 28

Which do you see as your priority or more important to you for your future?

School	15%
Football	85%

Question 29

Do you want to go to college?

Yes	56%
No	44%

Question 30

Do your Parent(s)/Guardian(s) want you to go to college?

Yes	79%
No	21%

Question 31

What other sports do you play competitively?

	Nothing	Play Other Sports
U17's	83%	17%
U16's	90%	10%
U15's	33%	67%