

**Exploring the uniqueness of the current Irish Diaspora: Graduates
Destined for Distant Shores, but not Gone for Good
Louise Fitzgerald (TCD MSc student)**

Modern Identity and Global Citizenship

Drawing on psychology, sociology and migration theory my stance explores the concept of Global Citizenship, and the extent to which immigration has become a rite of passage for modern graduates. The Celtic Tiger had a transformative effect on Irish culture with a modernising and internationalising impact on citizens. Irish graduates see migration as important, seeing it as necessary to equip themselves as global citizens and enhance their future employment opportunities.

Importance migration and international experience

Indeed modern graduates view international experience as highly valuable to career prospects, with a recent survey in Britain revealing that 1 in 3 in believe they'd have a better job if they had lived or studied abroad. Such sentiment is felt most strongly among the graduate age bracket, with 54% under 25 believing their lack of international experience has held them back. Thus the experience of life and work abroad is alone considered a big 'pull' factor in emigration. Furthermore, the types of careers that ambitious internationalised graduates hope to occupy are currently better served beyond Irish shores. Given this, the task of the Government is now to develop an economy that will lure such graduates back to this country in the future.

“All in it together?” Discarding fairness and future for the sake of expediency
Liam Kneafsey (TCD MSc student)

Whenever an economic or budget crisis forces governments to make difficult choices, two crucial questions arise when assessing their actions. Firstly we must ask if everyone is “in it together”, that is, whether the burden being shared equally across different social groups or are certain groups instead being targeted by virtue of their organisational weakness or ‘outsider’ status? Secondly, we should assess a government’s response by considering whether specific government action in difficult times is likely to strengthen society in the future or are myopic decisions likely to create further difficulties down the road?

When we look at this government’s actions with regard to youth employment during the ongoing crisis, the answers to both questions do not look especially positive. The significant youth unemployment problem (possibly masked somewhat by growing emigration) has been met with limited measures such as a relatively meagre internship scheme that is underpaid and may become all the more exploitative if recent proposed changes are implemented. This disadvantages and stigmatises unemployed graduates. What labour market reforms there have been do not constitute fair policy in the first instance as they require graduates to accept pay scales that do not apply to incumbents which has the potential to breed unhealthy resentment from graduates towards co-workers who are doing equal work for unequal pay and towards their representative union that in some cases has protected incumbent members at the expense of outsider graduates. The government has pursued these positions for reasons of political expediency and to avoid industrial unrest that might be generated by targeting incumbents. As a result of pushing down wages for graduates entering the public sector, the best unemployed graduates (e.g. graduate nurses) may instead decide to leave the country for foreign shores where wage levels at entry are higher and often the cost of living is lower. This is likely to hurt Ireland’s public services in the long term.

A similar approach has been taken by the government towards third-level education more broadly where the supposed long-term investment in the ‘knowledge economy’ has been instead replaced with austerity measures that will disadvantage Ireland in the long-run as it attempts to compete for highly-skilled jobs in the global marketplace. Postgraduate education, for example, is likely to add considerable value but with the abolishment of the grant for postgraduates the decision to carry on to this level is likely to be reliant to a significant extent on the ability to pay rather than on a student’s ability and capacity to contribute. Again this is a group without a strong political voice but who are likely to be invaluable to the country in the long-term. Targeting education with austerity measures in such a manner is both unfair and ultimately self-defeating.

Do we need to reconceptualise the public university in the 21st century? **Sam Mealy (TCD MSc student)**

The general decision by government to impose austerity measures & the long-term investment in education as a driver of economic growth

Policymakers' imposition of austerity measures across the EU periphery in light of the ongoing financial and economic crises has instigated a number of significant debates about Ireland's role in the Eurozone and the wider EU, the efficacy of a monetary union without a concomitant fiscal union, and indeed the appropriate policy response to crises in general.

Whilst of obvious importance, the almost hysterical nature of these debates occludes some foundational issues at the heart of education policy that we should be addressing now more than ever. It is a truism that in the increasingly globalized and de-industrialising global North, education is integral to economic success. Austerity measures on education in Ireland, at all levels, thus hurt both current students and future generations. The distributional conflicts surrounding second-level class sizes, teachers' unions, and third level student fees are central to this debate.

I would like to use this crisis, so to speak, however, to open up a new debate about the role of education policy and specifically universities in a 21st century democracy. Is the liberal model of education in Ireland – one that mimics that of the UK and the US to a certain extent – the best one? Are we over supplying graduates with generic degrees and non-specific skills? Do we need to reconceptualise our institutes of technology or create new institutions to provide vocational/practical training in various areas – is it controversial to say that not everyone should go to university?

And what is the role of the public university in Ireland today? Will austerity measures become institutionalized into permanent reductions in public funding for third level institutions? Do Irish public universities then go the way of many of their American and British counterparts by becoming increasingly dependent on international student fees and corporate donations? And can we leverage new technologies to actually democratize universities further – are bricks and mortar institutions needed to deliver a business or history degree?

These are the kinds of questions around which I would like to anchor my presentation.

A reconceptualisation of postgraduate employment and the Irish university itself: underpaid internships and academic managerialism

Conor O' Neill (TCD MSc student)

Ireland since 2008 has seen dizzying levels of youth unemployment and offered increasing insecurity and a narrowing band of opportunities for recent graduates. It is not difficult to feel like an 'outsider' in the current labour market.

The results of such a situation are troubling and numerous, extending beyond stark emigration and unemployment figures. The internship phenomenon shows no signs of abating: traditional entry-level jobs are disappearing, being replaced by largely unpaid positions that raise serious questions over equal access of opportunity and basic labour laws – the vast majority of recent graduates simply cannot afford to work for free. Those from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds are unfairly penalized for pre-existing economic inequality and those that are lucky enough to have a family home to rely on struggle to develop any level of basic economic mobility. Recent government policy has entrenched this situation – the JobBridge scheme offers €50 per week to interns for a minimum of 30-40 hours work. This monetary reward, coupled with often questionable 'experience', is hardly fair remuneration for graduates' time and effort. Their worrying status as a rite-of-passage for graduates leverages job insecurity and perpetuates an ultimately exploitative dynamic.

More broadly, how are young people responding? Many are emigrating, of course, but an increasing amount are approaching university with the 'can it get me a job?' mentality weighing extremely heavily on their minds. This is a sad yet understandable response to the current situation, but so much will be lost if generations of Philosophy/Art/English/etc. students opt to pick a 'safer' business degree because they know that the 'big four' conveyor belt, an exploitative, unfair, and unpaid/underpaid internship, or a one-way ticket to London and a set of crossed-fingers is almost all that's waiting for them when they graduate. If the Irish university succumbs completely to economic pressure and return-on-investment based managerialism it may lose its crucial place as an avenue for broader intellectual inquiry, and Irish society will be the worse-off for it.