

Examining Ireland's response to COVID-19 unemployment in 2020

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Abstract

The coronavirus global pandemic is the first and potentially last pandemic that many nations will ever experience. Alongside its potentially life threatening health implications, it has shaken the world's economy to its core and put unemployment rates at an all time high. It is predicted that the disruption to the global economic climate will be similar to that during the post World War Two era. (O'Toole, 2020).

This study aims to examine Ireland's response to COVID-19 induced unemployment during 2020 under four objectives. The first is to critically assess Ireland's response to COVID-19 through policy changes and welfare innovation. The second objective is to critically compare the response of the United Kingdom to COVID-19 unemployment through their policy changes and welfare innovation. Historically, they are a nation with a similar approach to public welfare as Ireland and who have tackled COVID-19 unemployment in a different manner. The third is to spatially assess COVID-19 unemployment across Ireland using Pandemic Unemployment Data from the Central Statistics office and Geographical Informations Systems through ArcMap. And finally, the fourth is to explore graduate confidence and perception of the Irish Labour market in light of a huge increase in nationwide unemployment for the second time in twenty years.

The results of the study show that Ireland has created two new and very considered policies, the Pandemic Unemployment Payment and Temporary Wage Subsidy to support those who have lost their jobs due to the nation wide lockdown and restrictions. Ireland's policies were much more generous and put into action much more quickly than those in the UK. They were also focused on maintaining employer and employee links in a bid to reactivate the Labour Market as effectively as possible. It is also evident from the analysis of this study that some of the worst affected counties in Ireland are adjacent to the Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland border. The study also ascertained that many upcoming university graduates have little confidence in the Labour Market, with many choosing to further their education in the hope of increasing their graduate opportunities in this shaken market. Many also believe that the government could have done more to help graduate students. The study concluded that in the face of the great unknown the Irish government struck hard through their strict lockdowns and

restrictions with the aim and priority of protecting the health of citizens and for that they must be applauded. And provided adequate support for the unemployed throughout this crisis.

List of Acronyms

CSO: Central Statistics Office

CJRS: Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme

ECB: European Central Bank

ESRI: Economic and Social Research Institution

GDA: Greater Dublin Area

GIS: Geographical Information Systems

IMF: International Monetary Fund

ITM: Irish Transverse Mercator

JJSP: July Jobs Stimulus Plan

JSS: Jobs Support Scheme

PUP: Pandemic Unemployment Payment

TWS: Temporary Wage Subsidy

UC: Universal Credit

WHO: World Health Organisation

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Chapter 1. Introduction

"We have moved to a recession that will be worse than the one we experienced in 2008,"
UN Deputy-Secretary-General, Amina J. Mohammed (Alessi, 2020).

1.1 Overview

This dissertation proposes to carry out an examination of Ireland's response to Do you have any final comments on the economic climate for third level students in the wake of COVID-19? unemployment as a result of the coronavirus pandemic and state imposed national lockdowns, on the grounds of changes in public policy and state welfare during the year 2020.

On Wednesday, March eleventh, 2020, the World Health Organisation, (WHO), declared a global pandemic in lieu of the outbreak of the novel coronavirus, (COVID-19). This revelation came as there was an excess of three million confirmed COVID-19 cases globally. Due to the unknown nature of the virus, a lack of testing equipment and most importantly a vaccine, the WHO recommended nations to restrict the movements of their citizens and encourage social distancing to prevent the spread of the virus. (Shariati *et al*, 2020).

COVID-19 has affected everyone, not only through its direct health implications, but through "serious economic destruction". (Beirne *et al*, 2020). According to O'Toole the COVID-19 pandemic has led to the most severe disruption and sudden upheaval to global economies since the end of the World War Two era. With the aim of lowering infections and "flattening the curve" of the virus's hold on nations, strict country wide lockdowns have been imposed across the world. (O'Toole, 2020). As stated by Hale and Webster and the Oxford Stringency Index, a composite measure that tracks and compares the various lockdown and restriction policy responses by governments in a bid to tackle COVID-19, Ireland has had one of the "strictest and longest lockdowns". (Hale and Webster, 2020). Throughout three separate lockdowns in 2020, the Irish economy and thus Irish employment suffered from a "deep freeze". (O'Toole, 2020). It is the responsibility of the Irish government to firstly: support citizens through the pandemic both on grounds of health and economic support and secondly; to amend public policy and state welfare to allow the most efficient and effective economic and thus unemployment recovery.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

As the COVID-19 pandemic is currently a real time event, there is an abundance of literature being published daily. However, given the unstable nature of the virus it is often difficult to grasp the full extent of economic and employment damage. While there has been a surge in vaccinations, new variants of COVID-19; including the South African and Indian variants, have shown possible vaccine resistance and thus a potential delay in the end of the pandemic and return to “normal” or at the very least a post COVID-19 normal. The aim of this study is to examine Ireland's response to COVID-19 unemployment in 2020.

1. To critically examine Ireland's response to COVID-19 unemployment through policy changes and welfare innovation.
2. To critically compare the response of the United Kingdom to COVID-19 unemployment through their policy changes and welfare innovation. Historically, they are a nation with a similar approach to public welfare as Ireland, who have tackled COVID-19 unemployment in a different manner.
3. To spatially assess COVID-19 unemployment across Ireland using Pandemic Unemployment Data from the Central Statistics office and Geographical Informations Systems through ArcMap.
4. To explore graduate confidence and perception of the Irish Labour market in light of a huge increase in nationwide unemployment for the second time in twenty years.

1.3 Dissertation Structure

This paper is divided into five separate chapters. Chapter one, the introduction, introduces the pertinent background information of the paper. It is key to understand how our current economic and employment climate came to be. This section also covers the four main objectives to be achieved. This is followed by Chapter two, the literature review. Here relevant literature pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic and unemployment are found. Chapter three, the methodology, specifies and justifies the methodology undertaken in this study to achieve the aim

and objectives of this study. Chapter four, the results and discussion section, covers the key findings of the research, while discussing their implications. It will also include any limitations to this study. Finally, Chapter five is a conclusion of the research as a whole and will reiterate any key findings.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1 The Great Recession

In understanding Ireland's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is vital to explore how it coped and subsequently recovered from The Great Recession, Ireland's most recent era of large scale unemployment prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Notably, Ireland was one of the “hardest hit” countries by the 2008 financial crisis and due to its remarkable turnaround, it has been dubbed “the poster child for recovery”. (McGann, Murphy and Whelan, 2020). As opposed to an epidemic, unemployment during The Great Recession was largely attributed to the collapse of the construction sector and property prices, a tax and employment rich division. During the five year period from 2007 to 2012, Ireland experienced a 10% increase in unemployment to 15.5%. However, according to Bergin and Redmond, without the mass emigration during the Celtic Tiger growth period, (1995-2007), unemployment would be much higher. (Bergin and Redmond, 2020).

To mitigate the economic decline and high unemployment during The Great Recession, the Irish government made various policy changes and budget adjustments. Austerity measures in the 2009 national budget saw large decreases in annual revenue and expenditure. These abating trends were designed to continue until 2015, with an aim of adjusting the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), to just under 20%. (Bergin *et al*, 2010). In 2010, when the severity of the state of the Irish banking system was uncovered, Ireland turned to the European Central Bank (ECB), the European Commission and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), also known as Troika, for financial assistance. True recovery for the Irish state began in 2012. (Bergin and Redmond, 2020). The final and most significant policy change made to cope with the influx of unemployment and thus decrease in household incomes were changes in both welfare and tax systems from 2009-2014. Callan *et al*, note that these new policies saw a 15.5% decrease in annual income of the richest 10% of the population and a 12.5% decrease in income for the poorest 10%. (Callan *et al*, 2013).

While the above strategies assisted in the recovery of our “elastic labour market”, it was those with graduate qualifications that fared the best. Those with lower levels of education continued to rely on welfare from the state, until the labour sector recovered from 2014 onwards.

(Fitzgerald, 2014). As mentioned previously, Ireland saw mass emigration during this time, as people sought employment opportunities not available here, this is key to remember when examining Ireland's response to COVID-19 unemployment as travel was not an option.

2.2 Ireland and COVID-19 Unemployment

2.2.1. COVID-19 Unemployment, a Crisis

The first lockdown in Ireland began on March 12, 2020, a day after the first reported COVID-19 death on the isle. Schools, childcare facilities, pubs and other non-essential businesses were quickly shut down. These lockdown measures were imposed until June eight, following the introduction of the tier restriction system. However, it was due to an increase in cases in summer 2020 and the formidable two meter distancing regulation that the service sector was severely hampered. (McGann, Murphy and Whelan, 2020). These closures led to the highest unemployment rate in Irish history at 28.2% in April 2020. (McGuinness and Kelly, 2020).

In a research study from the Economic and Social Research Institution, (ESRI), Ireland and twenty seven other EU member states were compared on their quarterly changes per sector in 2020. Out of the eight sectors reviewed, Ireland ranked last, (the greatest fall in income), in four sectors; Construction, ICT, Financial Insurance and Arts, Entertainment and Recreational activities. It also ranked second to last ahead of Estonia, in the Professional, Technology, Science and Administration sector. (O'Toole, 2020).

2.2.2. Introduction of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment and Temporary Wage Subsidy

During these unprecedented times, public policy became essential to stabilize the economy by supporting those whose incomes were affected in response to the lockdowns and tier system imposed to promote public safety. While adopting the “timely targeted and temporary” approach, the Pandemic Unemployment Payment, (PUP), and the Temporary Wage Subsidy (TWS), were created. (O'Donoghue *et al*, 2020; Gaspar and Mauro, 2020). The PUP and TWS began on March fifteenth 2020, in line with the last closure of non-essential services during the first national lock down. The PUP began at a set installment of €203 a week. It is important to

note that the scheme was not means-tested and open to those who had lost their jobs due to COVID-19 and lockdown restrictions. One of the few conditions of the new policy was that recipient had to have been employed prior to the first lockdown and not currently on the Live Register. It was then increased to €350 a week on March twenty fourth. The TWS aimed to encourage employers to keep employees by the government paying up to 70% of employee salaries. This was due to both the drop in turnover and social distancing guidelines that inferred a reduction in working hours for many. Similarly to the PUP, the TWS increased as the pandemic continued, rising by 15% in May. (Hick and Murphy, 2020; Tetlow, Pope and Morgan, 2020). Hick and Murphy argue that the rationale behind this scheme is that through fortifying the link between an employer and employee the opportunity to “kickstart” economic recovery in a post pandemic economic climate becomes available. (Hick and Murphy, 2020).

2.2.3 Further Policy Adjustments

Including the introduction of the PUP and TWS, the Irish government made other pertinent changes in policy. Firstly, in response to the need for self isolation practices if someone were unwell or may have contracted the virus, the government sought to eliminate waiting days for isolating workers to access their sickness payments. The six day wait period for those accessing the Illness Benefit was waived and the €203 weekly payment was increased to €305 and then increased again to €350, inline with the PUP increases in late March 2020.

Changes were also made to the housing policy. All evictions were suspended for a three month period from March 2020. This was further extended to September 2020 following the second national lockdown. Three and subsequently six month “mortgage holidays” became available for mortgage holders. Lastly, in an effort to promote compliance with the stay at home and social distancing practices, the government suspended all job search requirements for those receiving Job Seekers Allowance. (Hick and Murphy, 2020).

2.3 The United Kingdom and COVID-19 Unemployment Policy Response

To critically examine Ireland's approach to COVID-19 unemployment it is important to examine how other nations have responded. The United Kingdom, (UK), is an excellent comparator to Ireland as they share a “fraught history, whose welfare systems share a common origin”. Importantly, both nations are also within the liberal groups with regards to welfare and “capitalism literatures”. (Hick and Murphy, 2021: Deeming, 2017). Despite their similarities, Murphy argues that Ireland has been on an “expansionary trajectory”, a policy that encourages economic growth, as opposed to the UK’s “pathway to retrenchment”, a reduction in government spending during times of economic trouble. (Murphy, 2012). The UK sought to provide a quick cash flow to newly unemployed workers and the self-employed who had lost their income due to COVID-19 as unemployment rose to 5%. (Partington, 2021).

On March twentieth 2020, the Universal Credit, similar to the Irish Job Seekers Allowance, was increased. The UC can be broken into three distinct parts and each was amended differently. First, the standard contribution of UC was increased by £50 to £94 per week. Secondly, the Local Housing Allowance was increased in an effort to further support all housing costs and thirdly the dismissal of the Minimum Income Floor that seeks to limit the earnings of the self-employed. The UK also suspended active job seeking, a condition for those receiving the UC, for three months from the beginning of restrictions in a bid to enforce social distancing and stay at home restrictions.

In conjunction with the beginning of lockdown the UK government announced the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, (CJRS), also known as “furlough”, this scheme aimed to reinforce the relationship between employers and employees by subsidising employee wages by 80%. Hick and Murphy argue that this scheme created some disparity between recipients as those working in essential services could potentially earn less than those receiving the CJRS and not working at all. In 2020 the UK saw an excess of 9.3 million recipients of the CJRS. An important aspect to note in the UK policy changes was that the CJRS and UC were not mutually exclusive and are both means tested. Recipients who were earning a low wage on the CJRS could also claim from the UC, should they meet the conditions.

Policy changes were attempted in October 2020 in the form of the Winter Economic Plan and the Jobs Support Scheme,(JSS), that would replace the CJRS. However, the JSS only lasted a fortnight due to a second wave of infections and thus a second and more harsh lockdown. This policy strove to support jobs deemed “viable” and sought for employees to work a minimum of one third of their total hours and receive a salary amounting to 77% their pre COVID-19 salary. This scheme required that all employers would be responsible for paying 55% of all hours worked. Following the second lockdown, the government amended this policy by pledging to pay 66% of employee salaries, while requiring them to

work only 22% hours in place of the 33% previously. Hick and Murphy dispute the justification for deeming certain jobs more “viable” as there is no definitive metric of variables that would allow such a classification. (Hick and Murphy, 2020; Tetlow, Pope and Morgan, 2020).

An important critique of the additional pressure on employers to further support their employees risked increasing unemployment as a whole due to a lack of overall income into business.

2.4. An Employment Standstill

McGann, Murphy and Whelan argue that the COVID-19 crisis has “wiped out” the employment gains from labour activation¹ and while doing so has exposed the “fragility” of Ireland’s welfare state in the wake of a major economic downturn ensuing major concerns for a successful post COVID-19 recovery. Perez *et al*, note that many of the “key economic” and employment sectors can be “characterised by low wages and precarious conditions of employment”, with the majority of the employed being women and young adults. (Perez *et al*, 2020). Cotes *et al*, have found that in Ireland it is young women working part time in low skilled jobs that are among the most affected and highest concentration of those currently unemployed due to covid-19. This is also the case for many low paid, non-graduate workers under the age of twenty five who currently have a COVID-19 adjusted unemployment level of 41%. (Coates *et al*, 2020; McGann, Murphy and Whelan, 2020). With certain sectors of the population succumbing to the economic and unemployment thralls of COVID-19, it is ever important that new policy seeks to support the nation as a whole.

2.5. Why This Research Is Relevant

This study as a whole aims to critically examine Ireland's response to Covid-19 unemployment in 2020 through changes in policy and examine how these changes are being experienced across the nation. From the review of existing literature it is clear that there is a gap in this field for such a study. Currently there has been some research into comparing policy across the globe, there is little in relation to Ireland and its population. A quantitative analysis is needed to understand where in Ireland has suffered from COVID-19 inferred unemployment the worst. It is also vital to assess the confidence that graduates may have in the market as it may potentially affect them for the rest of their working lives, due to a severe lack of jobs or government activation.

¹Labour activation consists of various programs founded by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection that aim to help introduce/ reintroduce job seekers to employment through skill learning and expansion.

²The Live Register, run by the Department of Social Protection, is used to provide monthly information on those currencies seeking social welfare.

Chapter 3. Research Design and Methodology

3.1. Theoretical Framework

In a bid to examine Ireland's response to the COVID-19 induced unemployment through changes in public policy, this dissertation makes use of a positivist theoretical framework. Positivism draws from scientific principles to explain social phenomena. (Kitchin, 2006). Hassard argues that positivist knowledge is both practical and objective with a foundation stemming from “principles of empirical certainty”. With control over the physical and social states of society, positivist science has the capability of changing one's beliefs and understanding in social organization, imperative for examining the various policy changes. (Hassard, 1995).

As the third objective of this paper is to spatially assess unemployment in Ireland as a result of COVID-19 and the fourth objective aims to explore graduate confidence and perceptions in the Irish labour market in light of mass unemployment. , this approach is key as positivists often rely on the spatio-temporal arrangement of data. (Earl, 1954). The Vienna Circle perceived positivist frameworks as “the only way” to achieve knowledge and rational solutions and in this instance to locate the country worst affected by the COVID-19 unemployment. (Johnston, 1986; Kitchin, 2006).

3.2 Quantitative Methods

This study makes extensive use of quantitative research methods. Creswell and Poth have defined quantitative research methods as the “process of collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and writing the results of a study”. This greatly contrasts the more “holistic” approach found in qualitative research. (Creswell and Poth, 2016; Creswell, 1994). Following Leedy and Ormrod's approach to quantitative research, this study involves the collection of numerical data for analysis under the classification of descriptive research as opposed to experimental or causal comparative. The descriptive approach examines the research in its present state through the identification and correlation of various attributes relating to the phenomena at hand, in this instance to the COVID-19 pandemic. This study will make use of surveys for data collection,

allowing the researcher to gather data pertaining to the here and now. (Leedy and Ormrod, 2001; Williams, 2007).

3.3. Spatial Analysis of PUP Recipients Across Ireland

There were two methods of spatial analysis applied with GIS through ArcMap in this study with the aim of understanding the spatial unemployment across Ireland in 2020. The first method was inspired by a South African study by Weir-Smith and Ahmed who aimed to understand the unemployment in South Africa from 1997-2007, on spatio-temporal level. They made use of census unemployment data from each year and performed spatial autocorrelation on their data using the Moran's I tool in ArcMap. One of the key results of this tool was the Z-score which indicates the measure of standard deviation. When calculating Moran's I, the distance method is set to the Inverse Distance method. This applies to Tobler's First Law of Geography; "everything is related to everything else, but near things are more related than distant things". (Weir-Smith and Ahmed, 2013; Tobler, 1970; Miller, 2004).

To complete the spatial analysis aspect of this study there were minor "housekeeping" tasks to be done prior to following Weir-Smith and Ahmed's above method. It is important to understand and acknowledge that there are three assumptions to be made prior to the analysis. The first is that all data used is correct, free of errors and duplications, and second is that a recipient of the PUP may not also be a recipient of the Job Seekers Allowance, i.e. they are mutually exclusive. The final assumption is that the number of PUP and Job Seekers Allowance is a valid indicator and metric of a county's unemployment among the population. There are two relevant sets of data for this task. The first is the monthly PUP data from the Department of Social Protection. This shows the amount of PUP recipients per county per month. (April 2020 - December 2020). As the data was uploaded in weekly increments the total recipients per county per month was taken from the last report of each month Excel. To give context to the data once it is displayed in ArcMap the researcher added a Basemap of Ireland. To project the data correctly it was added to a pre-existing Counties shapefile from the Ordnance Survey Ireland using the editor tools in ArcMap. It is imperative to note that the coordinate system of the Basemap and the Counties shapefile are the same. This study used the Irish Transverse Mercator, (ITM), as the coordinate system.

As the required method requires point data the researcher used Google maps to assign coordinate points to each county in Excel. To display the Excel data in ArcMap it was uploaded to the project file and using the “Display X, Y” tool, the points were projected onto the map. After ensuring that all data was being projected under the correct coordinate system by using the “Project” tool, the county and PUP were merged on ArcMap by using the editor tool. This process was repeated for the data relating to the amount and location of Job Seekers Recipients in 2019 from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection

Once the data was prepared the researcher followed the methods outlined by Weir-Smith and Ahmed for both the PUP and Job Seekers Allowance data. The maps were then stylised appropriately to aid the researcher in using them as accurate mediums for results.

3.4. Graduate Employment Confidence Survey

As mentioned above, descriptive research often makes use of surveys as a tool for data collection. In this study a survey was created on Google Forms. Its electronic nature and “easy share link” to distribute the survey made it an appropriate choice for both the target population and to remain in line with COVID-19 social distancing and lock down restrictions. The sample size of this survey was thirty people and the target population was final year university students in the National University of Ireland, Galway, (NUIG). The sample size was chosen out of opportunity and access to potential respondents. To avoid any potential bias in the results there were no leading questions. All questions in the survey, bar the final two, were closed ended with yes, no, maybe options for participants to select. This approach aided the researcher in the data collection process that subsequently will be used for comparison and analysis. The survey was kept short and had an average completion time of two minutes. This was to encourage participants to complete the survey. Participants were also kept anonymous in an effort to promote honesty and produce authentic responses.

3.4. Limitations

3.4.1. *Survey Limitations*

There were various limitations pertaining to the survey used in this study. The most prominent issue was the size of the sample population. NUI Galway has over 18,000 students alone and while not all of these are final year, there are certainly more than thirty selected and thus there is a significant bias. (NUI Galway, 2017). Further limitations to be noted include the lack of correct representation of the population of all third level final year students in Ireland. This lack of representation in respondents is further seen through the distribution of the survey as the researcher was tied to peers and personal contacts due to 1) social distancing and stay at home restriction and 2) the predominant gender within the researcher's personal contacts being female. These limitations can also be attributed to time constraints of the researcher.

3.4.2. *Map Limitations*

There are various limitations with regards to spatial analysis performed. Firstly, the PUP monthly and county data was only from April 2020 onwards in place of January as the scheme began in April 2020. Furthermore, the data for recipients of the Job Seekers Allowance in 2020 was unavailable on a county level and thus the 2019 equivalent was used. It is also important to note that there may potentially be issues with the point data used in this study, as the researcher made use of Google Maps for the point data. An area, (example; electoral divisions), breakdown of both the PUP and Job Seekers Allowance across Ireland may have provided a more in depth analysis as opposed to the county level should that data come available from the CSO or the Department of Social Protection and Employment Affairs.

Chapter 4. Results and Discussion:

4.1 Critiquing Ireland's Policy Response to COVID-19

A key critique of the PUP was an inadvertent incentive for both the employer and employee to avoid the TWS. The €350 a week PUP was higher than many recipients of the TWS were earning and as it was not means tested, many had more to gain when on the PUP. This fault also incentivized employers to let employees go as they would by saving on employee salaries. This leads to the severing of employer and employee connections which may hamper the return of many to the Labour Force in a post COVID-19 climate.

The PUP and TWS were initially only supposed to run for a three month period, until June eighth 2020, following the end of lockdown measures. However, this was not the case as on June fifth, the schemes were extended until August tenth and then extended again until April first 2021. The final extension was part of the July Jobs Stimulus Plan, (JJSP). (Hick and Murphy, 2020). These extensions in policy to prolong support for those unemployed due to COVID-19 and help them to maintain a good standard of living while facilitating stay at home measures and aid in reducing COVID-19 transmission.

The primary aim of the JJSP initiative is to encourage those who have been receiving PUP to return to employment post COVID-19 and following the ease of social distancing restrictions. Those who are unable to return to employment will be transferred to the Live Register and begin to receive Job Seekers Allowance at €203 a week. The gradual decrease of PUP will begin in July 2020 until it matches the weekly Job Seekers Allowance.

McGuinness and Kelly believe that there will be expensive issues for those transferring from the PUP to the Job Seekers Allowance as many will be unable to meet the current criteria in place to be an eligible recipient of the Job Seekers Allowance. (McGuinness and Kelly, 2020). While the JJSP can be seen as good encouragement for many to rejoin the Labour Force, it lacks the actual aid that many will need. It is likely that many PUP recipients will not have jobs to return to in April 2021. It is incredibly unlikely that COVID-19 will be eradicated in the next few months nor will the world have returned to a “normal” state. The government would benefit from adding to the JJSP or creating additional policies that will support workers in the return to work.

Suggestions include investment by way of financial and opportunity into Labour Activation and potentially a monetary incentive for participants as participation encouragement. Another suggestion that may keep workers from the Live Register and fortify links between employees and employers again would be the re-introduction and amendment to the TWS or the creation of a similar policy, much like UK's JJS, wherein workers are required to work a minimum of 22% of their total pre COVID-19 hours and their employer will pay 66% of their salary. The implementation of similar policy wherein the government would request workers to work a certain percentage of their hours and have their salary paid partly by the government and partly by their employer. Through this potential scheme employers will be supported and thus so will their workers. As workers' hours increase in response to the decrease in restrictions, employers will require less government support and as this continues will eventually become wholly independent again. Issues with this suggestion may lie in the original salaries of workers and also the respective industry sectors.

4.2 Comparing Ireland and the UK's Policy Response to COVID-19

There are many similarities and differences to be seen with regards to policy response in both nations. The two primary goals of Ireland and the UK was to provide a quick access to income to those whose work had become affected by COVID-19 and to preserve employer and employee links. In a bid to support the unemployed Ireland devised an entirely new policy, (PUP), whereas the UK amended their pre-existing welfare payment scheme, the UC. The PUP came into effect five days prior to the UC amendment of an additional £24 per recipient and was significantly less than the initial PUP of €203. Additionally policy support came in Ireland as the TWS and its counterpart in the UK, the CJRS once again was less in the UK at 80% to Ireland's 85%. Importantly, welfare in Ireland was not means tested whereas in the UK it was. Differences were also found in the fact that UK recipients of the CJRS could also receive the UC in the form of a "Top-Up". However, in Ireland the PUP and TWS were mutually exclusive.

In the case of smaller and more temporary policy adjustments, both nations suspended evictions for a minimum of three months and promoted "mortgage holidays". They also reacted similarly with regards to reducing the wait period for those requesting sick pay in response to and encourage the self-quarantine strategy aimed at reducing virus transmissions. With regards to

policy extensions, Ireland extended the PUP and TWS until April 2021, whereas the CZARS was extended until October 2022. (Hick and Murphy, 2020).

It is evident that policy support in Ireland was much more compassionate and generous than that of the UK. However, many aspects of the initial policies were made at the beginning of the pandemic when there was a great state of unknown, especially with regards to its length. Ireland's continued generous support, lack of means testing and issue with the TWS may have hampered the economic recovery of the nation, who have potentially become over reliant on government assistance when compared to the UK. In the UK the lower CJRS may have retained employer and employee links more firmly than in Ireland. However, the merger increase in UC was barely adequate due to its non exclusive nature in supporting the unemployed during initial months of the pandemic.

4.3 Spatial Analysis of COVID-19 Unemployment Trends

The spatial analysis of the impact of COVID-19 unemployment across Ireland was conducted using similar standard deviation breakdown as was used by Weir-Smith and Ahmed and seen in Figures 1 and 2. The scale in each map indicates how negative to positive the standard deviation from the mean unemployment is. From Figure 1, the Trends in PUP Recipients during 2020 in Ireland, it is evident that Mayo, Galway and Clare are among the highest in unemployment above the mean, with Cork, Kerry and Offaly following closely behind. Also evident from Figure 1, on the opposing end are Carlow and Cavan, who are quite far from the mean employment. Lastly counties Roscommon, Laois, Meath and Tipperary are in line with the mean unemployment.

From Figure 2, Trends in Job Seekers Allowance Recipients during 2019 in Ireland, Donegal and Dublin were the furthest positive from the mean whereas Louth was the furthest negative from the mean followed closely by Roscommon, Kerry and Kilkenny. It was Sligo, Offaly, Cavan, Laois and Limerick that followed the mean unemployment the closest.

Therefore, it can be assessed that Carlow and Cavan have been the worst affected by COVID-19 unemployment and have required the most financial assistance from the government. It is interesting to note that for Monaghan, Cavan, Louth and Leitrim, who all lie on the Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland border, are the largest cluster of negative counties in Ireland. There are various potential reasons for this. The first is the different approach to

COVID-19 policy and their implementation among the UK and Ireland, as lockdown restrictions began on different timescales. The severity of lockdown restrictions may also have influenced those who live in border counties but work across the border as it is unlikely that they would have been permitted to travel the distance over the border should they be employed in the non-essential service sector. Differences in classifications of what is deemed to be “essential” in both nations may also be taken into consideration. A second cluster, albeit smaller, is located in the South East of Ireland, with counties Wicklow, Kilkenny, Wexford, Carlow and Waterford falling in the negative to the mean unemployment. For Wicklow which falls under the Greater Dublin Area, (GDA), and who may be considered a commuter area for Dublin may have been most impacted by the distance restriction on travel that were part of the imposed restrictions. For the latter four counties some suggestions for the higher rates of COVID-19 unemployment include the effect of lockdown and restriction measures on the tourism industry or a further link to Dublin and an overall access to work. However, the true reasons are unclear currently. (Carroll, Caulfield and Ahern, 2020).

Trends in those receiving the Job Seekers Allowance and thus the unemployed in 2019 are less clear than the trends stated above. Employment appears to be the most stable in the Midlands area, as counties Offaly, Laois and Tipperary are close to the mean. Similar to Figure 1, Figure 2 shows lower employment in the border counties of Monaghan and Louth and in Kilkenny in the South East. In contrast to Figure 1, Figure 2 shows higher unemployment in the West of the country with counties Mayo and Roscommon falling within negative to the mean.

Trends in Pandemic Unemployment Recipients during 2020 in Ireland

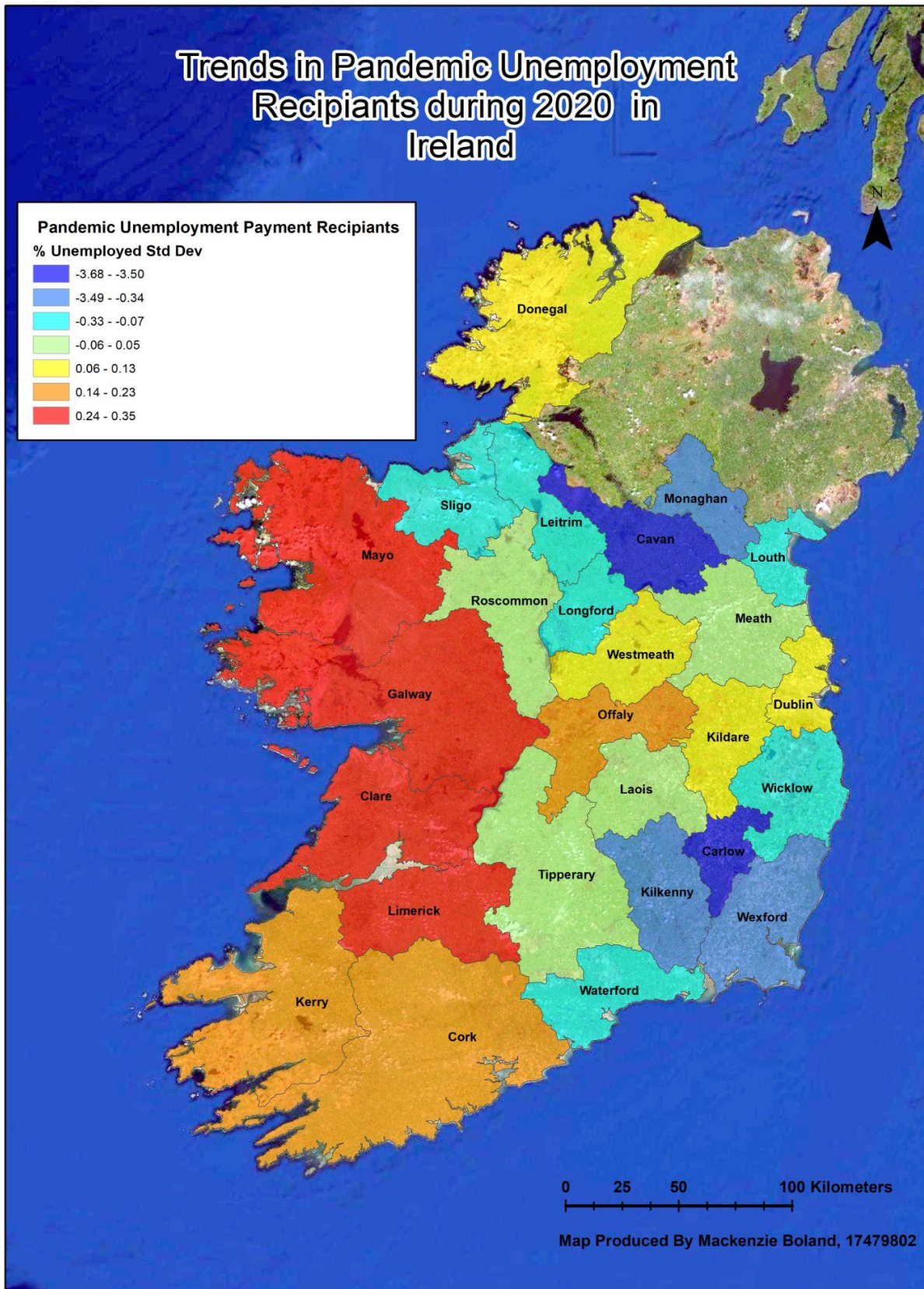


Figure 1. Trends in Pandemic Unemployment Payment Recipients in Ireland during 2020.

Trends in Job Seekers Allowance Recipients during 2019 in Ireland

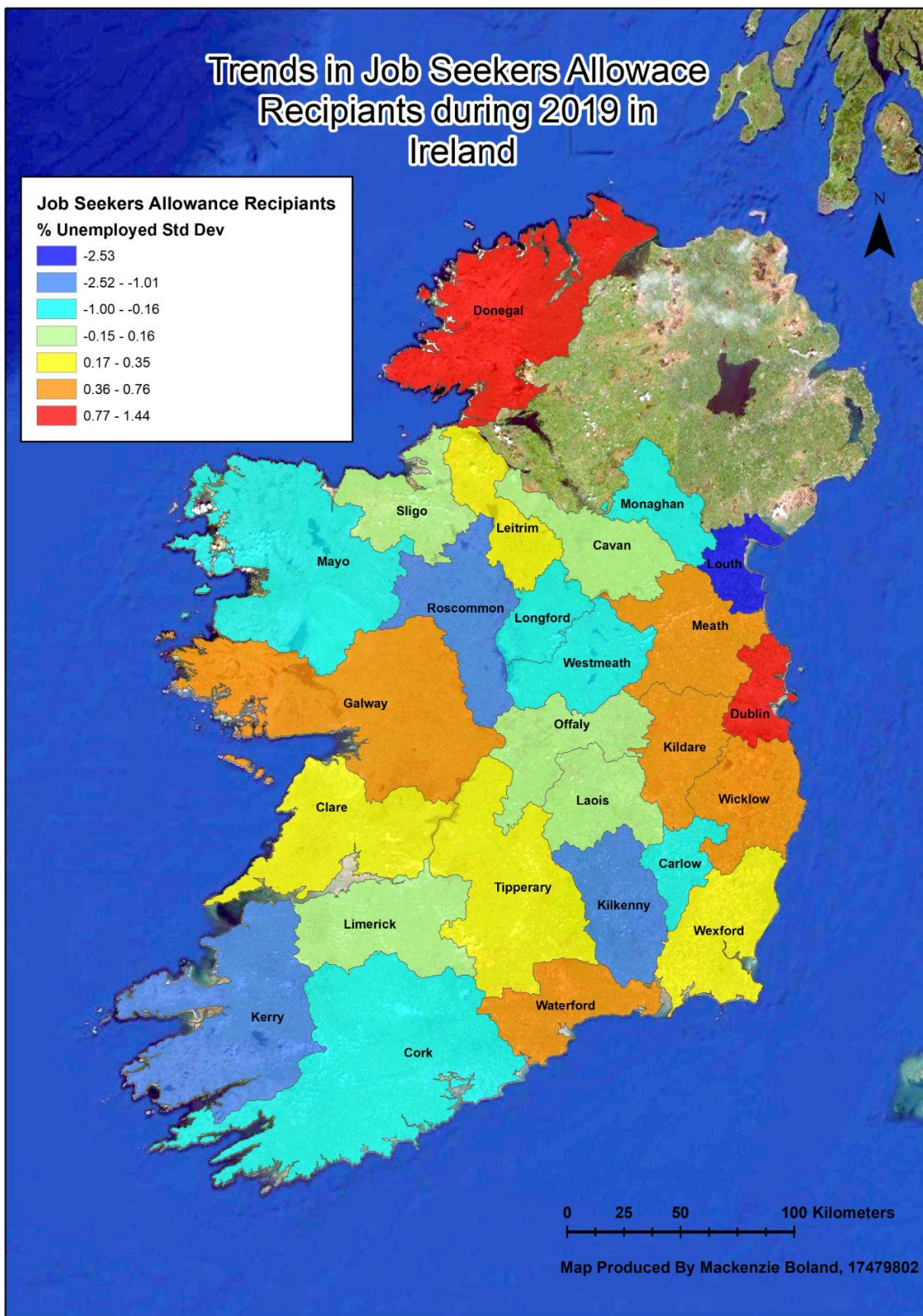
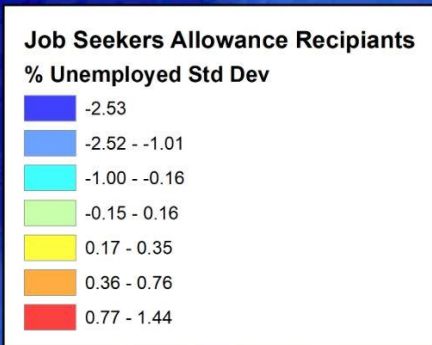


Figure 2. Trends in Job Seekers Allowance Recipients in Ireland during 2019.

4.4. Graduate Confidence Survey

In total thirty graduate students responded to the survey, inline with the predetermined sample size. When asked if COVID-19 had changed their post graduation plans, 58.1% of respondents said it has whereas the remaining 41.9% said it had not, Figure 3. Furthermore when asked if COVID-19 had impacted their future prospects, 75.9% of respondents said that they believed that there were less opportunities available. In conjunction with both questions and as seen in Figure 5, 48.3% of respondents said that they would be continuing their education, whereas 34.5% would be attempting to join the graduate workforce. From these questions alone it is possible to deduce that more students may be continuing their education in response to COVID-19 and its effect on the Labour Market and with the hope of improving their employment opportunities the following year, with the benefit of time for an improvement in economic growth and the advantage of a higher qualification level. This could possibly be a trend that continues in undergraduate classes in the post pandemic climate.

Has COVID-19 changes your post graduation plans?

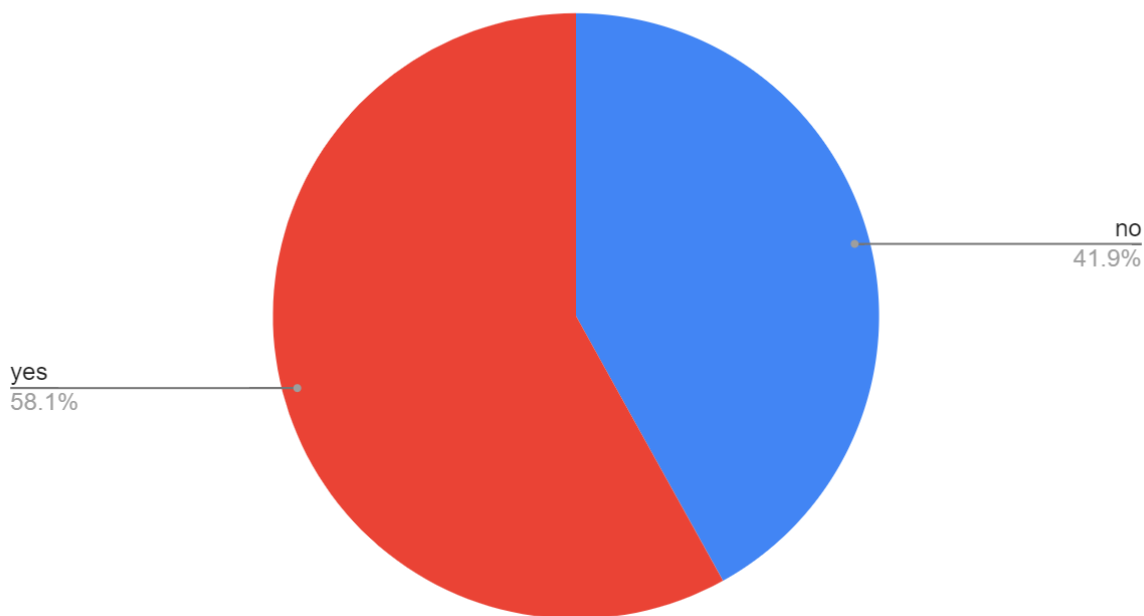


Figure 3. Graduate Student Survey Responses to “Has covid-19 changed your post graduation plans?”

Do you feel there are more or less opportunities for graduating students than the past?

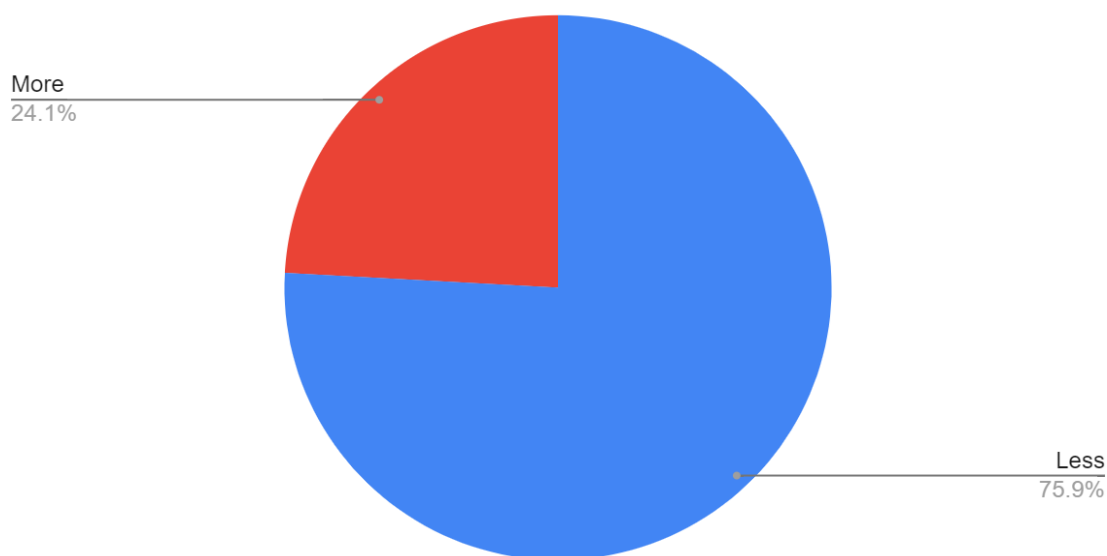


Figure 4. Graduate Student Survey Responses to “Do you feel that there are more or less opportunities for graduating students than in the past?”

Are you planning to enter the workforce or continue your education?

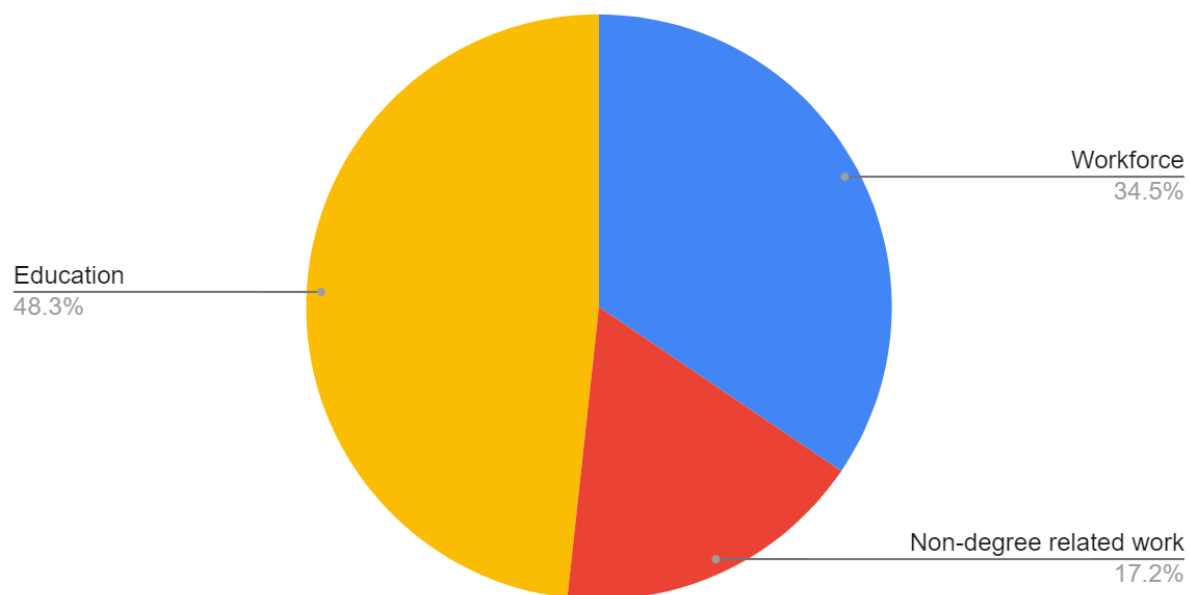


Figure 5. Graduate Student Survey Responses to “Are you planning to enter the workforce or continuing your education?”

When asked if they felt that the government had adequately supported third level students during the pandemic, Figure 6, 74.2% said they did not. In an open answer question that asked students how they felt the government could have supported them further, many suggested an increased financial aid payment of €500 compared to the €250 previously taken from tuition for the 2020/2021 academic year. Only three students chose to answer the final open question when asked if they had any final comments with regards to the current economic climate for third level students in the wake of COVID-19. Students one, fourteen and eighteen each felt that there is an overall lack of employment available for them. From summer jobs to graduate jobs they see little prosperity in the market, Figure 7. (See Appendix A for survey questions).

Do you believe the government has adequately supported third level students during the pandemic? (E.g. €250 off tuition)

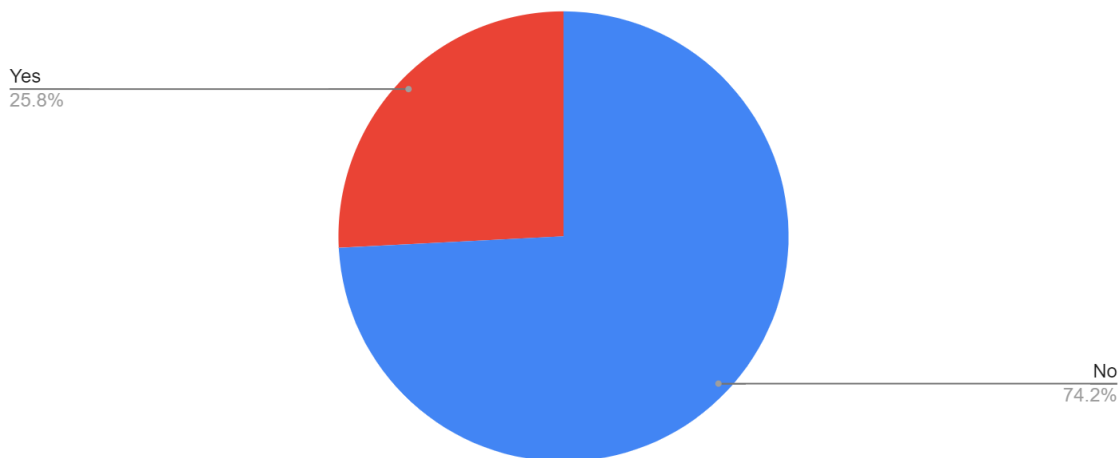


Figure 6. Graduate Student Survey Responses to “Do you believe the government has adequately supported third level students during the pandemic? (E.g. €250 off tuition)”.

Student	Comment
1	I simply don't think there will be a good level of employment for students leaving college this year.
14	In my particular line of study, it had been harder to find employment options after graduation because of having to work at home and companies having less money to invest in graduate programs/training for new employees
18	Many student 'summer jobs' are now non existent along with many parents jobs, with the PUP end looming, it is hard to finance rising rent prices without being able to save in the summer

Figure 7. Graduate Student Survey Responses to “Do you have any final comments with regards to the current economic economic climate for third level students in the wake of COVID-19?”.

4.5. Suggestions for Future Research

4.5.1. Spatial Analysis Suggestions

For future spatial analysis of trends in COVID-19 unemployment the researcher recommends using and comparing different methods and approaches of autocorrelation and interpolation.

This study uses Moran's I method for autocorrelation. Other options include Geary's C that aims to discover if neighbouring features of a similar phenomena are correlated. Another interpolation option includes the “Local Index of Spatial Association” or LISA method that makes use of both Moran's I and Geary's C to calculate the varying strength of autocorrelation within a study area. (Dale *et al*, 2002). Kriging interpolation is another potential method to assess the unemployment across Ireland. It makes use of variograms and can “minimise prediction errors” within them. (Oliver and Webster, 2007). Also the research and thus results would be further enriched by an analysis of the employment sectors across Ireland. If certain sectors, such as tourism and arts and recreation, i.e, the service industry, are more prominent in some counties than others, this could be a potential answer for the reason for the unbalanced increase in

national unemployment. This would also be the case for areas that did not see large increases in unemployment if sectors such as I.T. and pharmaceuticals are most prominent there as they were least affected by lockdown and restriction measures. It would also benefit to include the limitations stated in section 3.4.2 of Chapter three.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, Ireland's policy introductions of the PUP and TWS to help cope with COVID-19 were exceedingly generous to the Irish citizens in their time of need, but were not without fault. The non-means tested aspect of the PUP may have provided pre pandemic high earners with too little income, or pre pandemic low earners with an excessive income. If this were short term there may be little issue, however, as the pandemic has continued it is evident that long term solutions would be more relevant. Another key issue was the disparity between the TWS and PUP wherein employees were incentivised to break their employee connections to receive a potentially higher salary for less work.

It is evident that Ireland acted more quickly, more benevolently and with a lot more support than the UK. The additional brand new policy appears to have been a more successful approach to supporting the unemployed. However, both nations must be commended for their swift implementation of new policy with regards to freezing evictions, supporting the self isolation guidelines and allowing mortgage breaks.

From the spatial analysis it is evident that the counties, Cavan in particular, along the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland border are among the worst affected by COVID-19 unemployment and it should be a priority for the government to find out why this is. Their investigation should also include the cluster in the South East of the country. The finding of these investigations could greatly aid in the creation of new policy aimed at COVID-19 employment recovery.

In understanding graduating students it is evident that many feel as though COVID-19 greatly decreased their confidence in the labour market as a whole. Some have found employment effectively “non-existent”, while others feel that it is increasingly “harder to find employment”, partiality in the sector they desire to work in. With future plans being disrupted many have chosen to avoid entering the workforce for some time and are pursuing further education. Possibly with the hope of improving their employability chances in a shaken market.

It must be noted that the COVID-19 pandemic was a barrage of unknowns and had a large fear factor at the beginning. It was the first pandemic and public health emergency for many lifetimes and governments were operating within a space of ever changing information for quite some time, information that was often contradicted on a daily basis. There were no correct

or incorrect responses for governments to have and there were bound to be inevitable issues with any action policy put forward. Considering all the available information on the transmission of the virus, the Irish government struck hard through their strict lockdowns and restrictions with the aim and priority of protecting the health of all their citizens and for that they must be applauded.

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Appendix A: Survey Questions

1. Has covid-19 changed your post graduation plans?
2. Do you feel that there are more or less opportunities for graduating students than in the past?
3. Are you planning to enter the workforce or continue your education?
4. Do you believe the government has adequately supported third level students during the pandemic? (E.g. €250 off tuition).
5. How could the government have better supported third level students during the pandemic?
6. Do you have any final comments with regards to the current economic climate for third level students in the wake of COVID-19?.