

University of Derby

Constructing professional identity: the role of postgraduate professional development in asserting the identity of the career practitioner.

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Abstract

The professional identity of career practitioners in the UK has become increasingly challenged in recent decades due to the influence of government policy and the dominance of work-based qualifications. Privatisation, multi-professional working and workforce realignment have all contributed to a reshaping of the career guidance professional. This research examines the views of a group of practitioners all undertaking continuing professional development (CPD) in the form of a postgraduate award. The participants were all UK based practitioners working in a career related role; all were either currently on programme, had completed or stepped off with an interim award within a masters programme. The research explored practitioners' views at a time of significant upheaval, of themselves as professionals, their professional identity and the extent to which postgraduate CPD contributed to this.

The research utilised a case study approach employing document analysis, questionnaire, in-depth interviews and narrative biographies. These tools were specifically selected to enable sequential analysis of data allowing findings from each stage to be rigorously tested out by the next research tool. Applications from potential students were initially analysed helping to establish motivation for undertaking a programme of this type, an on-line survey explored practitioners views of themselves as professionals, motivation for postgraduate study and potential outcomes for themselves, their organisation and their profession. In-depth interviews and narrative biographies provided a voice allowing participants to explore their personal journey with their studies and how this engagement contributed to the establishment, maintenance or enhancement of their practitioner professional identity.

Continuing professional development was classified as consisting of three types, operational, experiential and formal. Findings suggested participants predominantly valued formal CPD with operational being perceived as only meeting employer contractual compliance. Postgraduate level CPD contributed to professional identity through engagement with reflection, theory, policy and academic study. Ethics and client focus were central to the professional identity of the career practitioner. Postgraduate study was perceived to empower practitioners and to contribute to the professionalisation of the sector and give parity with other public sector professions.

The research contributes to both the limited body of knowledge addressing professional identity within the career guidance context and discourse addressing professionalisation of new professions. It offers a shared professional perspective that can inform the evolving policy debate aiming to professionalise the career and allied workforces. The research offers a unique insight into a profession in transition and the voice of practitioners who have experienced successive waves of government policy, which has been often internalised as de-professionalisation.

Key words; careers practitioner, CPD, professionalisation, case study, postgraduate study.

Acronyms and glossary of terms

ACEG	Association of Careers Education and Guidance – Professional association representing careers educators
AGCAS	Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services – Membership organisation of university careers services
CDI	Career Development Institute (Professional association from April 2013)
CEDEFOP	European Centre for Development of Vocational Training
CEG	Careers Education and Guidance
CEIAG	Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance
CPA	Careers Professional Alliance
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CPE	Continuing Professional Education
DBIS	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
Dip CG	Diploma in Career Guidance (previous qualification)
DIUS	Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
FE	Further Education
HE	Higher Education
IAEVG	International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance
IAG	Information, Advice and Guidance
ICG	Institute of Career Guidance – largest professional association for the careers sector until March 2013
LGTB	Local Government Training Board
LLUK	Lifelong Learning UK – the sector skills council with strategic responsibility for the workforce development of staff working in the lifelong learning sector until 2011
Matrix	National Quality award for adult careers information, advice and guidance

NAEGA	National Association for Educational Guidance for Adults – professional association representing adult practitioners
NCVQ	National Council for Vocational Qualifications
NEET	Not in education, employment or training.
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PG	Postgraduate
PGCE	Postgraduate Certificate in Education
QCF	Qualification Credit Framework
QCG	Qualification in Career Guidance
QCG/D	Qualification in Career Guidance/Development (Scottish qualification)
SDS	Skills Development Scotland
S/NVQ:	Scottish/National Vocational Qualifications
SFA	Skills Funding Agency
WBL	Work-based learning

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Chapter 1 Introduction and Context

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter the rationale and motivations for this study are explored. To support an understanding of this a brief history detailing the policy changes in relation to career guidance is offered combined with an analysis of the career workforce. This aims to set the parameters surrounding the study and provides a contextual framework for the discussions that follow. The chapter concludes with an exploration of project aims and the structure of the thesis.

A number of factors contributed to both choosing to engage with a Doctor of Education programme and in selecting the specific topic area on which to focus. The career guidance profession is multidisciplinary drawing predominantly, but not exclusively, from psychology, sociology and economics. Consequently much of the research undertaken within the field is conducted from a non-career practice perspective. The specific body of literature addressing key concepts such as training, qualifications and continuing professional development (CPD), professionalism and professional identity for the career guidance workforce is somewhat limited and draws from a small but prolific body of researchers with a professional background (Bimrose 2004, 2006, 2009; Colley 2009; Douglas 2009a, 2010, 2011; Mulvey 2004, 2011a, 2011b; Reid, 2007; Reid and West, 2011) to whom reference will be made. Jackson (1998) calls for a research culture within career guidance practice to support the generation of theory and tools to better inform practice. Bimrose (2006) challenges the sector whose primary concern is career progression yet fails to give this same priority to its own workforce.

1.2 The reflexive researcher

Throughout my career my area of practice has increasingly focused on continuing professional development. This has culminated in my current role where I have responsibility for professional development and research activities in a university based research centre whose niche area is career guidance. My work as a tutor on an MA Education programme, combined with my interest in career guidance as a

profession, contributed to both engagement with the doctoral programme and the selection of the topic area.

This research was undertaken from an insider researcher perspective. This brings with it both challenges and benefits. Insider research brings familiarity with the context but also raises a number of issues for me in terms of reflexivity and subjectivity as a researcher. Bryman and Cassell (2006) consider reflexivity as sensitivity to the significance of the researcher within the research process. As an insider researching 'my' students within 'our' occupational sector created a number of tensions that needed to be addressed. These included the multiple roles represented by myself and the participants, my worldview of the sector based on my knowledge and experience and an acknowledgment of my own professional practice in terms of guiding people on their career development. Although these do not provide a definitive list of concerns they proffer the main areas I felt required consideration. Other issues are considered more fully within the section addressing ethical considerations.

As a lecturer, researcher, practitioner and active member of my professional sector in terms of membership of a professional association I have multiple identities and roles, as do many of my students. I was concerned that one or all of these roles might impact on the researcher relationship I was attempting to establish with the participants. More problematic was my role within my employing organisation whereby I am commissioned to deliver training, development and research to external organisations, the contact for which may also be a student on the programme. It was important that I recognised and acknowledged throughout the research the multiple identities/roles that I had with participants, while also negotiating my role as a researcher within that specific interaction. This I achieved in a number of ways, through clear consent and permission procedures and by negotiating and contracting at the start of the interview sessions what our roles would be in the process as interviewer and participant (see section 3.6 Ethical issues). As career practitioners they were aware of this need to clearly define the boundaries of the interaction. Bryman and Cassell (2006) consider this negotiation as

being able to share certain beliefs and assumptions. As a tutor on the programme and as a professional career practitioner I was continually aware of the need to separate out an advice role, which I could easily have adopted, particularly during the in-depth interviews with participants, as this would have had ethical implications for the study. For many of the participants this was a very tense period as their jobs were under threat. On a number of occasions, I negotiated with the participant that I would address their questions about their study or professional practice at a later time. Maintaining the separation of the multiple roles for both myself as the researcher but also for the participants was at times a challenge and required regular review and assessment.

Fawcett and Hearn (2004) suggest that when the researcher acts reflexively they are a research participant rather than an expert. Within the context of this particular study this was an important element. Acknowledging and recognising my particular passion for CPD and for the professionalisation of careers practitioners was an area I needed to consider, especially as my views may not be mirrored by others. It is suggested (Fawcett and Hearn, 2004; Bryman and Cassell, 2006) that the researcher is implicated in the data by nature of their role in its collection and interpretation. Recognising that my own views could influence my interpretation of the findings, I used a number of techniques to address this. These included analysing the data over a period of time and re-analysing it to check and re-check the findings. I also consulted with my supervisor and a critical friend who did not work in the sector to provide an objective view of the interpretation.

Reid (2008) acknowledges that 'we cannot escape the culture and historical circumstances which shape our understanding. We are already in the research' (2008:25). As such it was important to acknowledge and recognise that it is impossible within an interpretative study to separate the researcher from the study. I was within the research as well as conducting it. My insider role provided access to the participants as I already had a relationship with them as their tutor. This also added a level of robustness to the data collection and interpretation as we shared a

common professional culture, language and understanding of concepts and terminology. This is not to suggest that these were not regularly checked for clarification.

1.3 The research

This case study was located within the University of Derby's Master of Arts in Education: Guidance Studies programme. The Guidance Studies pathway was one of a number of named specialist awards available to individuals undertaking the MA in Education. The programme was delivered through e-learning and was aimed at practitioners working in a role supporting individuals in making career and learning decisions. The programme consisted of four 30-credit modules and one 60-credit Independent Study module. To be eligible for the Guidance Studies award participants needed to take the two dedicated guidance modules, Guidance Theory and Professional Practice and Guidance in Context. They also needed to focus their independent study on a guidance related issue. The remaining modules consisted of a core module, Evidence Based Practice, focusing on research methods and an optional module selected from all the modules available on the programme.

The focus of the programme was continuing professional development for practitioners with experience but not necessarily a formal qualification in careers /educational guidance. It differed to other masters level programmes for careers work in that it was not a 'top up' to initial training, which was the case for many in the sector. It provided an opportunity for practitioners to explore key issues relating to guidance theory and practice. It emphasised the practical application of guidance theory in relation to current and future policy, action research techniques to support the development of knowledge and experience of research, and reflective practice relating to personal, career and professional development. The programme was attractive to practitioners with work based learning qualifications that had little or no engagement with career related theory. The definition of the programme as a case study will be discussed in sections 3.5.2 and 3.5.3 specifically.

I first took over the leadership for the Guidance Studies pathway for the MA programme in 2004, and at the same time I worked on a project with Professor Jonathan Brown, (then) Chair of Educational Guidance with the Open University. He had recently undertaken a small research project with some colleagues; see Harrison, Edwards and Brown (2001). Professor Brown kindly gave me the data and tools from a research study which explored the motivations and impact of study on a group of students taking the 'Guidance and Counselling in Learning' module within the Open University's MA Education programme. This stimulated an interest initially in wanting to replicate the study to assess similar issues with students on my programme. The topic area evolved due to the changing policy agenda to focus on perceptions of career guidance as a profession and the professional identity of those students undertaking a similar postgraduate programme of study.

My primary motivations for this study focused on, firstly, gaining an understanding of our students' perceptions of professional development and themselves as professionals. Secondly, to contribute to discourse on career guidance as a professional practice and contribute to the policy debate on professional development within this arena.

This research examines the role of postgraduate continuing professional development and its contribution to the professional identity of career practitioners. The study refers specifically to practitioners based in the UK and acknowledges the differentiation of services throughout the devolved administrations. It addresses two key questions.

Question 1 – What are the motivations for engaging in postgraduate study as continuing professional development (CPD)?

Question 2 – How do outcomes of postgraduate study contribute to professional identity?

The research project aims to assess:

- Practitioners' perceptions of themselves as professionals;

- Practitioners' understanding of professional identity and how they articulate this;
- The motivation for practitioners' selection of a postgraduate programme as a form of CPD;
- Practitioners' perceptions of the benefits and contributions of postgraduate level study in relation to their professional practice; and
- How practitioners perceive postgraduate CPD contributing to professional identity.

The study presented an opportunity to investigate what drives practitioners to invest, commit and engage in higher level qualifications, their expectations and the perceived impacts on their professional development, personal development and practice. The study evolved as a result of initial investigations focusing on professional identity of career practitioners, primarily because there was little written about this at the time. There have however been a number of subsequent studies that have run in parallel to this one (Colley, 2009; Colley, Lewin and Chadderton, 2010; Douglas, 2009a; 2009b; 2010; 2011).

This study both complements and augments these studies as its locus addresses the influence of postgraduate continuing professional development on practitioner professional identity. The study was confined to students practising in the UK, and the vast majority of these were in England. This ensured commonality as far as possible in relation to training and qualifications, work contexts, professional association membership, language and exposure to and impact of policy agendas. It is recognised that the devolved administrations may have different delivery models, but the policy agendas are generally comparable.

Career guidance is open to many definitions; within the European Union (EU) it is defined as:

Referring to a continuous process that enables citizens at any age and at any point in their lives to identify their capacities, competences and interests, to make educational, training and occupational decisions and

to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which those capacities and competences are learned and/or used. Guidance covers a range of individual and collective activities relating to information-giving, counselling, competence assessment, support, and the teaching of decision-making and career management skills (Council of the European Union, 2008: 2)

This definition provides a sense of the complexity of career guidance and the broad ranging activities and settings in which it can be found. Within the study 'career practitioner' is the generic term adopted for individuals who undertake this role as their occupation. It is recognised that 'career adviser' is one of the terms in regular use and others may define themselves as educational guidance practitioners or personal advisers. Where this has occurred those practitioners have been identified by their own terminology. The term 'career' and 'careers' are used interchangeably, 'career' is preferred when considering the individual practitioner, 'careers' tends to be applied when referring to organisations or when used as a title.

Career practitioners work in a range of settings, predominantly funded by the public sector. Their roles will often be broad but specifically focus on providing support and assistance to help individuals to assess their abilities, search for learning and work opportunities and to implement decisions which affect their careers (ICG, 2013a).

Other studies addressing professional identity have focused on particular sectors of careers work e.g. Colley (2009), Colley et al. (2010) with Connexions personal advisers and Douglas (2009a, 2009b, 2010, 2011) with career advisers in New Zealand. This case study incorporates the views of practitioners representing a wide range of professional practice locations. As such it offers a unique opportunity to compare viewpoints across the sector but also to identify commonalities in perceptions and ideas. This study therefore contributes to the body of knowledge addressing professional development, professional identity and the career practitioner as a professional. This research will help to establish a better understanding of how career practitioners see themselves, mirrored against the backdrop of the current professionalisation agenda for the sector.

1.4 The purpose of career guidance

Internationally, career guidance is higher on the public policy agenda than ever before [career guidance] referring to services intended to assist individuals, of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers. Watts and Sultana (2004:107)

Career guidance has been identified as a key contributor to public policy agendas (Watts, 1996, 2011; OECD, 2004; Sultana, 2004; DIUS, 2007) focusing on lifelong learning, social inclusion, labour market efficiency, economic development and social mobility. Across all the countries within the UK, career guidance has been utilised as a tool to drive forward a number of government policy initiatives over the last two decades, including the skills agenda, (DIUS, 2007; DBIS, 2009, 2011) widening participation (Dearing, 1997), social inclusion through Connexions (DfEE, 1999a, 1999b) and social mobility (Cabinet Office, 2009). Each policy shift has resulted in a refocusing of the activities of the career guidance workforce: the most monumental being Connexions resulting in a realignment of the workforce, work practice and ideology.

1.5 Career guidance - a brief history

In autumn 2001 'Career Guidance Today', the Institute of Career Guidance's official professional journal, dedicated the issue to the discussion of the career guidance professional. The issue begins with the following statement:

Never have so many politicians had so much to say about the shaping of a service as in the case of career guidance. Winston Churchill, Ernest Bevin, William Beveridge, Barbara Castle, Shirley Williams, Neil Kinnock and Tony Blair are only some of those whose ideas and actions have changed the means of delivery and scope of the service provided. But throughout, those involved in career guidance have kept their focus on client needs through assured levels of skill and ethics – some of the hallmarks of a profession. Hughes and Peck (2001:14)

Over almost the last hundred years, with the inception of the Association of Juvenile Employment and Welfare Officers in 1922 which transformed into the Youth Employment Service in 1948 (Peck, 2004) the careers service has suffered from a type of disconnect with policy divided between education and employment. Policy was traditionally initiated and delivered by different government departments

representing policy goals including social inclusion/exclusion, social mobility, widening participation and the skills agenda. These suggest the wide-ranging role career guidance is perceived as having in supporting these various policy agendas. Over recent generations educational opportunities have increased for young people and adults through policy agendas intent on addressing issues of social inclusion, social mobility, skills deficits and global competition. Underpinning all of these has been the provision of high quality information, advice and guidance to enable individuals in making informed choices (Sultana, 2004).

The role of the career guidance practitioner will vary depending on where in the UK they are employed (Watts, 2006) as the composition of services differs across the various national administrations. Until the Trade Union and Employment Reform Act (Great Britain, 1993) the career service had been a part of the local authority stable of local public services. The Act put the service out to tender to private companies (Peck, 2004) and was followed by two decades of frequent change. Over this time there evolved differentiation between services in England especially for young people, largely delivered in partnership between schools and independent external services and those for adults delivered through tendered contracts (Peck, 2004).

As a result of Bridging the Gap (DfEE, 1999a) which presented a view of many young people as being disengaged from learning and work, a new approach to working with young people was defined. This resulted in the creation of the universal Connexions service which aimed to provide a multi-skilled support service for young people, whilst prioritising those at risk of disengagement from learning and work (Peck, 2004). The introduction of the new service had a dramatic effect on the careers service by widening the 'career workforce' to include practitioners from other occupations who had responsibility for young people. Youth workers, teachers and social workers were often recruited to the newly created role of personal adviser. This agenda established a new term for disengaged young people, they became known as 'Not in Education Employment or Training' (NEET). The purpose of the new personal adviser role was to provide a multidisciplinary approach to increase

inclusion for those young people at the margins of society (Reid and West, 2011). The Connexions service remained the national branded service for young people until 2010 when services for young people were subsumed back into the local authority.

Local authority youth support teams currently deliver career provision for young people specifically identified as being at risk. Adult services for those aged 19 and over are accessible through face-to-face and telephone/web-based provision through a sub-contracting arrangement under the National Careers Service funded by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA). Watts (2006) presents a full description of the diversification of career guidance in the home countries and specifically how devolution has impacted on delivering services which may be differentiated or stratified dependent on which part of the UK is involved.

The Coalition Government extended the concept of a universal service through establishing a National Careers Service (DBIS, 2011). The service aims to offer provision that will be accessible from a wide range of locations including places of worship, shops and co-location in Jobcentre Plus offices and colleges. The services for schools have been reconstructed within the Education Act (Great Britain, 2011). This, combined with the public sector cuts, has in effect dismantled a dedicated career service for young people (Watts, 2011; Hooley and Watts, 2011) and resulted in a significant reduction in staff available to provide career services for young people. It could be argued that this realignment of services has had a significant impact on the career profession, regardless of which client group practitioners associate themselves with in terms of both professional practice and professional identity.

This case study is located within a context of on-going change which although not unique within the public sector has had a dramatic impact on the role of career practitioners and how they see themselves. The data collection was undertaken within a time frame of specific transformation (2007 to 2011) and against a background of a sector in a state of flux. During this period, careers services for

young people experienced significant change with the statutory duty for careers guidance becoming the responsibility of schools. This, combined with the government austerity measures, (Hooley and Watts, 2011) has contributed to a significant reduction in the careers workforce for young people across England. In relation to services for adults the National Careers Service was created from the existing Next Step service in 2011 (DBIS, 2011). Its remit to provide a universal adult face-to-face service and web/telephone based provision for young people. The implications of these policy changes are still evolving and as such the full impact is unknown. This case study is both timely and pertinent as it provides an opportunity for practitioners to offer their perspective on these changes and their perception of themselves as professionals within an evolving context.¹

1.6 Defining the career guidance sector

Although career work with young people and adults has predominantly been considered, this is not the totality of the sector. The sector is broadly considered to incorporate a wide range of individuals who provide information and advice about learning, career and skills development as one role within their job (Hughes, Hutchinson and Neary-Booth, 2007). This can include teachers, academics, job centre staff, social workers, youth workers, librarians and other professional sectors of employment dealing with young people. In early 2000 the term 'IAG' was adopted referring to Information, Advice and Guidance. This adoption of generic terminology became accepted as the nomenclature for public funded services supporting transitions in relation to learning and work. Additionally the sector has been supported by a number of professional bodies representing discrete elements of the sector such as careers work in schools, higher education, adults and young people (Bimrose, 2006; Hughes, Hutchinson and Neary-Booth, 2007; Neary-Booth and Peck, 2009). This further contributes to the confusion and complexity of defining what a

¹ Throughout the duration of this research project there has been significant change in relation to the professionalisation of the careers workforce. This has been in terms of the merging of the majority of the professional associations, new qualifications, requirements for CPD and the introduction of a professional register for the sector.

career guidance practitioner is and how they differ from an IAG worker, or if indeed they do.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2004) identifies that in many countries guidance is neither a defined profession nor identifiable as a separate occupation. This is not necessarily the case in the UK where individuals are employed to provide career guidance and support as a primary role (Neary and Jackson, 2010). For many individuals the delivery of IAG or Career Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG), which is how it is often referred to within schools/colleges, is a role which they are expected to do with no or limited training or qualifications (Skills Commission, 2008). OECD (2004) suggests the need for a differentiated workforce with a wider range of trained support staff. The Learning and Skills Council (2004) produced an IAG competency framework which differentiated the competencies required for different roles; they have split competencies between information, advice and guidance provision.

It has been argued that guidance professionals perceive themselves as being de-professionalised as a result of the erosion of the occupational identity (Bimrose, 2006; Colley and Lewin, 2008). This relates to the dilution of the workforce with the inclusion of many individuals having IAG activities attached to their roles combined with the adoption of more generic qualifications such as the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ).

1.7 Training and Continuing Professional Development

Until the introduction of the NVQ in Advice and Guidance in the mid-1990s, the Diploma in Careers Guidance (Dip CG) was the established professional qualification. This, awarded by the Local Government Training Board (LGTB), consisted of a two-year programme of study; the first year as initial training delivered full time in higher education institutions and the second year, as supervised training delivered in the workplace (Bimrose and Wilden, 1994). The qualification was later renamed the Qualification for Career Guidance (QCG), (Qualification for Career Guidance and Development in Scotland QCGD) and was managed and awarded by the Institute of

Career Guidance (ICG), the largest professional body for the sector. The introduction of the NVQ and the diversification of the workforce have created confusion with both the QCG at HE level 7 (HE level 11 in Scotland) and the S/NVQ at level 4 being recognised as professional qualifications. As such the level of qualification required tended to be at the discretion of the employer or contractually defined. The result of this has been a diversely trained group of practitioners with a range of qualifications. Bimrose (2006) defined this as a fractured, fragmented and rather ad hoc system of both initial training and continuing professional development.

Within career guidance it is difficult to estimate the qualification level of career guidance practitioners, as there has been limited labour market intelligence collected (Hughes, Hutchinson and Neary-Booth, 2007). Lifelong Learning UK (2009) undertook research to map the careers workforce in 2007. This presented career practitioners as being more highly qualified than the average of UK occupations with 39% of the workforce holding level 5 National Qualifications Framework (NQF in England and Wales) qualifications, but suggested that there were few practitioners with level 6 or level 7 qualifications. This raises concerns as it suggests that few practitioners in the adult sector have a first degree. It is however difficult to assess the accuracy of this data as there is no definitive data set for the highest qualification levels for practitioners in the sector.

The Skills Commission's inquiry into information, advice and guidance (2008) identified the existing qualifications for training career practitioners as fragmented and incoherent. A key issue in relation to the work-based qualification route has been the lack of theoretical input within the NVQ qualifications (Jeffrey and McCrea, 2004; Skills Commission, 2008). Essentially there is limited standardisation of theoretical knowledge within training for career practitioners.

Although the career sector may have had a standard approach to initial training prior to the introduction of the work-based learning qualifications, continuing professional development remained either individual or organisation-based. There have been no

specified requirements from the professional bodies; it has been left to the employing organisations and the individuals themselves to engage in development activities. The Skills Commission (2008) acknowledged that the initial training and continuing professional development of career guidance practitioners were inadequate. It also identified a deficiency in the assessment of workforce development needs and a lack of a systematic approach to professional development. They recommended a review of initial training and CPD. The Milburn report (Cabinet Office, 2009) was also highly critical of careers work and the support for young people in accessing the professions. The Careers Profession Task Force was established in 2010 to examine and explore the reality of careers work with a view to professionalising the career sector. Their report *'Towards a Strong Profession'* (2010) recommend challenging the sector to demonstrate a commitment to CPD linked to common professional standards. Bimrose (2006) challenged employers within the guidance sector to ensure that time is ring-fenced and resourced to support professional development. Additionally, she suggested that the profession is core to the achievement of significant elements of government policy, therefore a trained, qualified and experienced workforce encouraged to engage in professional development should be given a higher priority.

The career guidance profession has over the last two decades faced considerable intervention from government, which has had a profound effect on initial training, qualifications, occupational roles and employers of practitioners. This study aims to explore how these changes have influenced career practitioners' perceptions of themselves and the factors that have mitigated the impact, through exploring the role of higher-level qualifications as a method for continuing professional development for guidance practitioners.

1.8 Structure of the study

The study is presented in seven chapters, which document the research study. It continues as follows:

Chapter 2 delivers a critical review of the literature which contributes to the theoretical framework; this informs the conceptual framework. It examines the established body of knowledge and discourse in relation to key concepts such as professionalism, and professional identity and those specific to the career guidance sector.

Chapter 3 examines the methodology adopted, the rationale and the philosophical approach to the study. This documents the ontological and epistemological debate that helped shape the selection of methodological approach. It explores the utilisation of a range of tools developed and applied to support the investigation and ends with an examination of the analysis of the various data sets within the case study.

Chapter 4 outlines the findings synthesised from the various data sets. The findings offer an analysis of participants' views gathered to explore the research topic. The findings reflect the conceptual framework which was used to structure and direct the case study. Each section presents a key discussion point and the sub-themes which contribute to it.

Chapter 5 presents a critical analysis and discussion arising from the findings in the previous chapter. It focuses on exploring the themes that have been identified. The chapter seeks to draw out and present the relationship between postgraduate professional development and professional identify, and factors which inform and influence this. It begins by considering the perceptions of practitioners in defining their relationship with the concept of professional development. It progresses to explore the impact of the study itself and how it contributes to their professional identity.

Chapter 6 provides a concluding synthesis of the findings and discussions generated. It examines new knowledge that has been generated exploring the benefits of postgraduate CPD and how it contributes to professional identity formation.

Chapter 7 focuses on implications for practice and research dissemination. It draws out and identifies how the study can contribute to and inform current discourse and future research opportunities. It presents the opportunities that have been selected and utilised to promote the study to date. These focus on local and national opportunities for dissemination as well as promotion through professional association activities. It ends with a selection of proposed future publications.

Chapter 2 Review of Literature

2.1 Introduction

This research seeks to explore the concept of professional identity from the career guidance practitioners' perspective. It examines the current perceptions of practitioners and the issues of presenting their work through a professional lens. The exploration of literature forms the foundation from which the research can be constructed and attempts to ensure that appropriate themes and gaps within the literature can be identified. These help to locate and ground the arguments underpinning the case study, which examines the role of postgraduate continuing professional development and its contribution to the professional identity of career practitioners.

2.1.1 Organisation of the literature

This section outlines the approach adopted in selecting and organising the academic and professional literature which informed the research. When starting to explore the literature addressing the concept of profession, the extensive nature of the academic discipline becomes apparent. As a branch of sociology it seeks to encapsulate an in-depth examination of occupational groups. It has therefore been important to establish parameters as to what will be included and excluded within the review of the appropriate literature. In addressing the needs of the research the review of the literature focused on two primary domains: the nature of profession and career identity of guidance practitioners.

The literature concerning the sociology of professions and the evolution of the professions draws predominantly on Anglo-American contexts and studies rather than continental European traditions. The rationale for this was twofold: firstly the participants included in the study all worked in the UK and therefore reflect this specific context; secondly, Freidson (1986), Macdonald (1995) and Evetts (1999) depict European professions as being more defined within state bureaucracy and administration as elite civil servants. As such texts located within the European

context have generally been considered less relevant to this research topic, excepting those specifically focusing on career guidance practice.

The selection of writers has been guided by the need to represent the leading theorists in the fields of CPD, professions, professionals, professionalisation, and other allied concepts such as professional knowledge and reflection. These concepts are often inter-related and as such much of their writing covers multiple themes. The texts reviewed predominantly focus on the period from 2000 to 2013 but are supported by a number of older seminal texts. These provide the background and context for the extension of current arguments within the field.

The paucity of literature relating to the career guidance professional in the UK required the inclusion of literature drawing more broadly from Europe, New Zealand and Australia. The topic of professionalisation within career guidance has global currency and this study can hopefully contribute more widely than only to the UK experience. The debate within the career sector examines the extent to which there is a collective perception or belief that career guidance emerged as a profession (Hughes and Peck 2001) and has a defined professional identity; or whether it sits within other definitions such as 'semi-profession' (Freidson, 1986; Eraut, 1994; Hoyle and John 1995; Becher, 1999). The literature is supplemented by discussion of texts from allied professions such as counselling, psychotherapy, nursing, teaching and youth justice as these have also experienced considerable professional realignment in recent years.

2.2 Theoretical framework

Through the analysis of the literature addressing the two main topic areas, namely the nature of profession and the identity of the career guidance practitioner, a number of key concepts were identified (see 2.15). The exploration of these led to a synthesis into three main theoretical domains. Each of these was composed of a number of interrelated concepts, which together created a theoretical perspective to underpin the study. This method of working effectively constitutes the use of a

framework of inter-related concepts which can be derived from the research and from published scholarly literature relevant to the topic of the thesis.

This section examines these domains in more detail and specifically focuses on the main theorists and a justification as to their inclusion and contribution to the study. The initial examination of the nature of the 'professional' commenced with exploring the multitude of ways in which the concept of the professional is defined. Freidson (1983, 1986) and Macdonald (1995) examined the historical perspective and the typology of what might constitute a professional, based on analysis of various traditional professions. These writings offered a useful benchmark to support discussions with study participants concerning how these definitions could be used to describe their own occupational area. This examination of the range of definitions was helpful in establishing the historical nature of profession as a concept and drawing out the evolutionary nature of the form of occupational categorisation (Perkins, 1989).

2.2.1 Professionalisation

When exploring the literature addressing professionalisation the importance of the professional project cannot be overestimated. Larson's (1977) seminal text 'The Rise of Professionalism' has influenced the discourse on the nature of how occupational groups progress to becoming recognised as a profession. Larson (1977) explores the process by which occupational groups seek to control the market and standardise qualifications and thereby achieve social mobility. The theory of the professional project offers an interesting model through which the current professionalisation of careers can be compared. The careers sector, as a result of the Careers Profession Task Force (2010) is engaging in a professional project of this type through the merger of four of the existing professional associations, development of a professional register and the introduction of the new level 6 qualification (in England). Within this case study the idea of the professional project is explored with the participants, particularly in considering what professionalisation might look like

for the careers sector and what might contribute to establishing careers guidance as a professional occupation. This is examined in section 4.3 Guidance as a profession.

McClelland (1990) builds on Larson (1977) by examining the impetuses for the professional project, describing these as 'above' and 'within'. The 'above' impetus addresses external influences which result in managers and employers imposing a professionalisation agenda on the workforce. The 'within' he defines as being driven by the occupational group, which results in substantial gains for the group. Within the context of careers guidance the initial impetus could be considered as coming from 'above' in terms of reports (Skills Commission, 2008; Cabinet Office, 2009) being highly critical of careers guidance, combined with government investment to support the formation of the Careers Profession Alliance (CPA) which led to the establishment of the Career Development Institute (CDI). In terms of this study there is an exploration with participants of the factors that might contribute to and drive a professionalisation agenda within the careers sector. This is considered in section 4.3.3.

Evetts (1999, 2003a, 2006) and Fournier (1999) both focus their work on professionalisation and professionalism which is used as a mechanism for occupational change and social control of occupational groups. These theorists provide a set of arguments which explore how professionalisation has evolved into managerial and HR discourse and away from the traditional 'professional' debate. This has particular relevance for contractual compliance and processes of standardisation of public funded services that increasingly impact on careers practice. Within this research study, approaches that have been adopted for standardisation of practice are examined, and the impact on the practitioner in terms of autonomy and professional practice is considered. The exploration of standardisation and power relationships in this thesis drew particularly on the writings of Foucault (1977, 1978). The concept of power being 'everywhere' contributed to exploring power relationships and manipulations of the individual. The issue of power also contributed to the methodological perspective and reflexivity throughout the study through informing the relationships between the

researcher and the study participants. This is considered in some detail in section 3.6 Ethical issues.

2.2.2 Knowledge

Hughes' (1963) seminal text 'Professions' defines the nature of the profession and the importance of knowledge and control in this. Within this thematic domain the literature explored incorporates the processes by which knowledge is created through initial training, reflection, and continuing professional development, and controlled through competence and credentialisation in terms of required qualifications.

Key theorists within this area include Quinn, Anderson and Finkelstein, (1996) who define knowledge as professional intellect; the highest form of which is self-motivated creativity. At this level the professional is highly motivated, creative and adaptable in their practice: especially in terms of embracing innovation. This model offered a useful framework to assess the types of CPD activities that practitioners had access to, particularly in terms of how they perceived their employers investing in them.

Eraut (1994) has written extensively on the concept of professional knowledge and how professionals maintain and develop their knowledge. His work explores the relationship between theory, practice and the context in which knowledge is produced. This locates the centrality of ongoing knowledge development for professionals and the role of reflection within this. These arguments have contributed to the exploration of the theory/practice dynamic as a focus of the postgraduate programme which comprises part of this thesis. In particular, the arguments addressing the development of a deeper appreciation of and engagement with the theory that underpins career related practice are explored section 4.4.2 Theoretical knowledge.

The concepts of competence and credentialisation have impacted on careers work and have received criticism particularly concerning the lack of theory and

opportunities to develop creative thinking. Jeffrey and McCrea (2004) are highly critical of this approach to the development of career practitioners: they suggest these methods limit the development of professional thinking. Their study provided an open critique of the competence-based approach. This was useful in informing and considering the benefits of an academic approach to developing professional practice as opposed to a competence approach.

The debate concerning 'competence' versus 'academic' development provided a context for participants' motivations for engaging in this form of CPD. Richardson (2004) and Swain and Hammond (2011) offered useful perspectives from which to explore the motivations for and benefits of postgraduate CPD. These studies contributed to a deeper understanding of how participants internalise their learning and externalise application of their learning within the context in which they work. Swain and Hammond (2011) further developed the ideas of Bourdieu (1986) and the concept of social capital. Bourdieu's (1986) work, in terms of cultural capital, provides an exploration as to the value of a qualification relative to other qualifications. In terms of this study does the achievement of a postgraduate award provide greater cultural capital for recipients? His work presents an examination of motivators and drivers for engaging with activities that will potentially enhance and support career development. Within the Swain and Hammond (2011) model the types of capital are further categorised into professional capital and personal capital. These offer a broader base from which to examine how engaging in postgraduate CPD can evidence these specific forms of capital. The concept of capital within CPD was important as it suggests the particular motives that drive and encourage professionals to engage in particular types of CPD. This was pertinent to this research in being able to examine the motivations and expectations of students in studying at postgraduate level.

In exploring CPD as a theoretical concept it was appropriate to consider the role of professional associations, especially in terms of internal control of the market. Professional associations are often a key stakeholder in accrediting and validating professional competence within occupations. Watkins (1999) defines the features

which professional associations share and how their role has evolved and now has a strong focus on facilitating the professional development needs of their members. This research study explored participants' membership of professional associations to assess the role that these institutions were perceived to have in developing professional practice. Mulvey (2004, 2011b) has written extensively on CPD within the career sector. Her work around the beneficiaries of CPD in particular, has supported an examination of participant perceptions concerning how postgraduate CPD can benefit clients and employers and contribute to the professionalisation of the sector. This has been important in terms of the conceptualisation of the study as perceptions and benefits of CPD are core. As such Mulvey has provided a basis from which to explore participants' perceptions of the beneficiaries, which is examined in section 4.4 Continuing Professional Development.

2.2.3 Professional identity

Just as there are definitional issues to be resolved with the notion of the 'professional' the concept of professional identity equally struggles with the need for clarity of definition. A primary element of this study was to explore what professional identity meant to those participants who were engaged in postgraduate study. Within this case study the key authors who provided models that could be tested within the research were Beijaard et al. (2004) and Ibarra (1999). These models were used to test out definitions of professional identity and to analyse the data for comparisons within the careers context. The definitions provided by Beijaard et al. (2004) were particularly important in establishing a theory that attempted to isolate the component parts of professional identity. The three-stage model Beijaard et al. (2004) developed through the meta-analysis of research, addressing formation of teacher professional identity, contributed to assessing the comparable experiences of careers advisers. This is explored in section 5.4, Professional identity, which considers the influences contributing to professional identity formation of career guidance practitioners.

In exploring the socialisation element of professional identity Ibarra (1999) provided a definition that related directly to practice. This was used with participants to support discussion as to what variables might contribute to a collective professional identity for the sector, in terms of how participants might describe the professional identity of a careers practitioner. Within a careers context Colley (2009), Colley, Lewin and Chadderton (2010) and Douglas (2009a, 2009b, 2010, 2011) provided timely explorations of the impact of policy in influencing professional identity. Both of these studies contributed to informing discussions with participants as to the nature of professional identity within the careers sector. Douglas (2010, 2011) in particular offered a theory which considered those interested in developing their professional knowledge.

The examination of professional identity led to an exploration of the concept of 'community of practice'. Lave and Wenger (1991) in their seminal work explore the role of situated learning and the acceptance of individuals through their interaction with experienced colleagues. They provided a platform to consider the importance of socialisation in establishing professional identity. Colley (2009), Colley et al. (2010) and Douglas (2009a) consider the relationships between colleagues and how this contributes to the development of practice. Within this case study, how the learning of participants was disseminated to their colleagues and within their organisations was an important aspect. This contributed to examining the community of practice and whether this has resonance for practitioners within the careers context. This is considered in section 4.5.1, Support for colleagues, which examines how learning within the programme was cascaded.

The theoretical framework therefore comprises these three constructs, professionalisation, knowledge and professional identity, each underpinned by a myriad of concepts. These are examined in more detail throughout this chapter and present an exploration of the broad based literature which influenced this study.

2.3 Defining Profession

Before considering how career guidance conforms or not to recognised definitions of profession, the definition of profession itself needs examining. Attempting to define professions offers an academic sub-discipline in its own right. Many authors (Freidson, 1986; Perkins, 1989; MacDonald, 1995) proffer definitions but in general they tend to focus on a set of key activities. The discourse extends from control of expert knowledge through typologies of what could be considered a professional occupation, to current debates addressing profession as a form of occupational social control.

The professional ideal was based on trained expertise and selection by merit, a selection made not by the open market but by the judgment of similarly educated experts...mastery of a skilled service vital to his fellow citizens (Perkin, 1989:xxiii)

The definition presented above represents a traditional depiction of what is considered a professional. Hughes (1963) focuses on the delivery of esoteric services, which can be advice or practice. Rueschemeyer (1983) refers to professions as expert occupations based on knowledge as a resource for social control of that expertise. Macdonald (1995:1) defines professions as 'occupations based on advanced, or complex, or esoteric or arcane knowledge' focusing only on the specialist knowledge that a professional would have. Freidson (1986) explores a number of definitions, one of which reflects many of the key components and characteristics:

Profession ... implies a method of gaining a living while serving as an agent of formal knowledge and implies as well the fact that bodies of formal knowledge, or disciplines, are differentiated into specialized occupations (1986:20)

These definitions reflect the discourse of their time, focusing on professions as defined by selective knowledge which only a minority of individuals have and are able to control.

Macdonald (1995) considers the functionalist approach and the extent to which professions can be differentiated from other occupations through defining the ideal

type of profession via an accepted and agreed typology. The 'traits' approach (Freidson, 1986; Hoyle and John, 1995; Becher, 1999) generally includes the following:

- (i) an occupation which constitutes a living;
- (ii) members have completed some form of higher learning and have a theoretical knowledge base from which expertise is based;
- (iii) provide a service for the common good (altruism);
- (iv) members are autonomous with primary identity with the profession rather than the employer; and
- (v) monopolise and control the market in terms of membership of the profession.

This typology is constructed through the synthesis of debated and accepted criteria used by writers within the field to define the professional paradigm with a view to creating a template by which all occupational areas can be compared (Macdonald, 1995).

Freidson (1986) explores profession from a phenomenological perspective as to who in society is determined a professional. Perkins (1989) puts the onus on the professional to convince society and the state of the need for their important service and to guarantee rewards to ensure it. Macdonald (1995) considers the state and society to be one and the same; professions win the support of the political, economic and social elite to reinforce their position. He goes on to consider the importance of control of the market, self-regulation and the ability of a collective to standardise their defined abstract knowledge, control the dissemination of such knowledge and negotiate its regulation with the state. Those able to achieve this can be considered the successful 'professional' occupations; through gaining recognition they are able to legitimise state 'protection' within the labour market (Freidson, 1986). Thus control of the market is deemed one of the primary functions of the professional group. Krause (1996) suggests that professions act with a dual motive, to provide a service and to use this for economic gain. However, to ensure a balance in not appearing overly self-serving, public interest must also be proffered. Freidson (1986) and Becher (1999) both make reference to the literature from the 1960s

onwards in exploring this and note that the writers from this time were critical of professions' commitment to economic self-interest rather than the common good. Evetts (2006) conversely suggests however that these two criteria are not necessarily opposed and that self-interest and public interest can be compatible.

2.4 Professions and career guidance

Across much of the western world there have been attempts to define career guidance as a profession. The extent to which the occupational area has been successful in this endeavour is debatable (Watts, 1999; Furbish and Ker, 2002; McMahon, 2004). CEDEFOP (2009), the European centre for the development of vocational training, conducted a Europe wide study to review trends in training and qualifications for career guidance. Their findings present great diversity as to the extent to which career guidance is professionalised within different countries. Two thirds of countries in their study offer specialist training at tertiary level with increasing emphasis on postgraduate professional training. There was substantial evidence of a growing emphasis on professionalisation within the career guidance industry through association with university academic disciplines. Within New Zealand and Australia there have been moves to position career guidance as a profession. McMahon (2004) documents approaches in Australia to develop quality assurance processes for career guidance. She considers the extent to which career guidance can be considered a profession and concludes:

If the 'Professions Australia' definition of profession is applied to those working in the career field, it is debatable how many career practitioners could be regarded as career professionals and how many of the career practitioner associations could be regarded as professional associations (McMahon 2004:5)

The rationale for this conclusion is located within a lack of specialist knowledge, a deficit of theoretical knowledge and a paucity of training and skills development within career development as a defined specialist field. More recently Athanasou (2012) conducted a survey of career practitioners in Australia. He suggests there are no uniform qualifications and half of the practitioners had no formal career guidance qualifications for the field.

It is difficult to imagine many professional fields that would accept such divergent educational-vocational qualifications (Athanasou, 2012:5)

Researchers in New Zealand (Furbish and Ker, 2002; Douglas, 2009a; 2010) have explored similar territory and arrived at similar conclusions. They document concerted efforts in New Zealand to present career guidance as a profession through the establishment of tertiary level qualifications and a chartered professional association. Again the number of practitioners with specialist tertiary career guidance qualifications was low and, similarly to Australia, formal qualifications and theoretical engagement were not evident. Douglas (2009b) in addition, identifies a lack of minimum level qualifications, registration and professional association membership.

Hughes and Peck (2001) present an historical depiction of the development of the careers service in the UK. They refer throughout to it as a profession without providing clarity as to why it is defined as a profession and by whom and since when. This appears to be a common occurrence within the limited and sparse literature that addresses the career practice profession in the UK (Bimrose and Wilden, 1994; Higginbotham and Hughes, 2006; Watts, 2012). The 'self-fulfilling prophecy' approach described by Hoyle and John (1995) could be attributed: if an occupational group refer to themselves as professions then others will accept them as such.

Within the UK career guidance has for some time been defined as professionally weak (Watts, 1999). Most recently the terminology has referred to 'a profession that is not yet strong', as mentioned in the report presented by the Careers Profession Task Force (2010), although paradoxically it refers repeatedly throughout the report to the 'Careers Profession'.

The gap between Watts (1999) and the Careers Profession Task Force (2010) contains the rise and demise of the Connexions service which evidence (Colley, 2009; Colley et al., 2010) would suggest significantly de-professionalised the workforce. This, combined with the diversification of the workforce involved in the delivery of

information, advice and guidance (IAG) services across a wide range of sectors, has had a profound impact on practitioners. Over the past two decades an increased range of individuals have both formally and informally included the provision of advice and guidance to support choices on learning, education, skills and career development within their roles. Often these individuals are providing these additional services without initial or specialist training (Harrison et al., 2001; Taylor, Vasickova, Byrom and Dickson, 2005). Allied with this, Mori (2001) suggest that individuals often seek support when making career decisions from informal sources such as family and employers rather than 'experts'; possibly signifying a lack of recognition or value in services provided by professionally qualified practitioners. Since one of the traditional criteria of the professional is the recognition of benefit to society, then the status of the guidance practitioner as a professional can be seriously challenged. Harrison et al. (2001) suggest that the wide variety of job titles, the variations in training from none to formal, as well as the range of settings that practitioners work in, indicate that many may want to work professionally but not necessarily be seen as a professional within the role. This potentially impacts on practitioners who do want to be seen as professionals as it challenges both their perceived status and their view of themselves.

The role of 'society' in bestowing professional status and recognition is important. This is often combined with public service, altruism and common good: concepts often depicted as core characteristics of a profession. Hoyle and John (1995) debate the functionalist view of profession as one where a grateful public bestows recognition on the occupation as opposed to the ideological view, which focuses on the power dynamic related to market control. Freidson (1983) suggests that from the phenomenological perspective there will be no single concept of profession as different stakeholders, whether defined as clients or employers, will review their experience in the light of what they perceive as professional standing, thus attributing their own set of preferred characteristics within their own definition of a profession.

So society in one guise or another is continually engaged in defining and evaluating professional traits. (Macdonald, 1995:7)

The importance of recognition by members of society needs to be addressed for maintenance purposes once professional status has been gained. Fournier (1999) suggests this relationship is continuously under negotiation, thus professions are never totally independent. Evetts (2006) claims that lay people need to be able to trust all professional workers whether they are plumbers or doctors, especially in relation to confidential information they might acquire. Evetts (1999, 2003a) also argues that professions and occupations share common features including identity construction, regulatory practices and work cultures, so negating the need to differentiate. Freidson (1983) conversely suggests that occupations should promote what is distinctive about them rather than common characteristics.

More recently reports by Hibbert (2010), McCrone, Gardiner, Southcott and Featherstone (2010) and Future First (2011) express a lack of confidence in current information advice and guidance (IAG) delivery and, specifically, cite individuals' preferences for seeking support from a range of 'non-career professionals', including family, teachers, mentors, alumni and individuals working in their areas of interest. Hibbert (2010) argues that many young people prefer to talk to people nearer their own age with some experience of the world of work, or a trusted adult, rather than an expert. The Careers Profession Task Force (2010) identifies lack of resources, appropriateness and currency of qualifications as contributing to this. John Hayes, Minister of State for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning in his speech on the Education Act proposed that turning high quality career advisers into 'Jacks of all trades' (as was the case with Connexions) with an expectation of excelling was unrealistic (Watts, 2011). Consequently the diversification of the workforce has had significant implications for the skills and qualifications of practitioners providing career guidance.

2.4.1 The evolving profession

As a result of the Careers Profession Task Force (2010) a reprofessionalisation strategy was defined and recommended to government. The career sector is not the only one to be reprofessionalised; this process is also being applied to the employability workforce (job centres and welfare to work workers) and the further

education sector. Although the Task Force's original remit focused only on services for young people the recommendations were extended to all career guidance provision. The recommendations specifically relevant to this debate included; the establishment of an overarching group representing the membership bodies, development of common professional standards, practitioners required to achieve a minimum level 6 qualification, a requirement for professional association members to demonstrate a commitment to CPD and commitment of practitioners to uphold professional standards. These recommendations therefore integrated all the trappings of professionalisation and professionalism and presented a 'to do' list of what needed to be achieved for professional recognition. Freidson (1983) refers to this as cosmetic change, which he claims, may not always be sufficient to obtain official recognition.

Perkins (1989) and Becher (1999) present a number of key changes which have impacted on professions. These include the effects of legislation and national policy, economic pressures, meritocracy, internationalisation, client attitudes, business values, managerialism, the rise of giant corporations, the emergence of new knowledge and techniques and the growth of specialisms and the impact of information technology. These contribute to a better-informed, even better-educated populace, and the trend in questioning 'knowledge authorities' has redefined the relationships between professions and clients (Karseth and Nerland, 2007). This also supports Freidson (1983, 1986) who suggests that 'profession' cannot be considered as a discrete concept but one that is a changing historical concept. This diminishing of status and privilege has specifically impacted on the public perception of the professional. It could also be argued that many of the traditional characteristics of the elite professionals, such as doctors and lawyers, including the mantle of altruism has in fact transferred to the new or emerging professions particularly those within the caring and helping fields, which could include career guidance.

Hughes (1963) considers how new and emerging occupational areas seek professional status as their roles become defined and recognised. Therefore, profession as a concept is continuing to evolve and develop. Fournier (1999) broadens this argument to consider that professionalism is being extended within occupational areas so that the concept of the professional 'becomes an empty and meaningless category potentially including anyone' (Fournier, 1999:281).

The discourse addressing profession can be associated with key theorists within the history of sociology including the works of Weber and Durkheim writing about qualifications and professional ethics respectively (Macdonald, 1995). More recently the discourse concedes the defining of profession as a contested concept (Freidson, 1986; Hoyle and John, 1995; Becher 1999; Macdonald, 1995). Through reviewing the history of the term 'profession' many conclude that as a socially constructed concept there has been a distinct inability to clearly define 'profession'. Hughes (1963) in his seminal text explores the aspiration of occupations (including vocational guidance) to attain professional standing. He considers that the journey that new professions embark on to become professionalised provides a greater understanding as to the meaning of 'profession'. Essentially the evidence around definitions within the broader literature addressing professions presents contested territories with changing parameters as to what constitutes a profession. This according to Hughes (1963) is driven by the changing needs of society often linked to advances in science and technology and social change. Using the varied definitions provided, career guidance as a profession generally fails to meet many of these, particularly common professional standards.

2.5 Professionalisation and professionalism

The professionalisation agenda therefore is one which continues to have much resonance, specifically in relation to what are increasingly described as new professions. The emphasis here is very much focused on the evolving process rather than the end structure. Evetts (2006) suggests that researchers have now accepted 'definitional uncertainty' around professionalism and that they have moved on. The debate now focuses on profession as a motivator of changing occupations and

particularly for social control of workers through active professionalisation (Evetts, 2003a). It could be argued that this is the current position of career guidance as it is currently in the midst of professionalisation whereby a process of standardisation is being applied. Much of the discussion and debate within this area focuses on a number of key arguments. Firstly the extent to which occupational areas pursue an agenda to become professionalised and the perceived benefits of this; this applies to those occupational areas which aspire to the recognition of being perceived as a profession and its members as professional (Hughes, 1963; Freidson, 1986; Macdonald, 1995; Aldridge and Evetts, 2003; Murphy, 2011). The second examines the use of professionalisation as a managerialist tool to control the occupational group (Evetts, 2003a; Felstead, Bishop, Jewson, Unwin and Kakavelakis, 2010). The third focuses on the generalisation of professional ideals and vocabulary (Fournier, 1999; Felstead et al., 2010) in relation to occupational areas which would not traditionally be considered professions such as catering and security: Fournier (1999) refers to this as the 'notion of professionalism'.

Macdonald (1995) building on Larson (1977) documents extensively the concept of the professional project and the journey which is adopted in achieving professional status. This refers to a context of market control by an occupational group. Larson (1977) focuses on the joint organisational element of this endeavour, which provides individual benefits. She considers that professional prestige is attached to the role and by default to the individual. MacDonald (1995) defines 'the project' as members of an occupational group who attempt to establish, maintain and enhance the occupation's position. This concept presents the process by which occupational groups seek to become what Evetts (2003b) defines as a 'privileged' or 'elite' occupational group. Hoyle and John (1995) assert that members of occupational groups seek to improve their status through recognition as a professional group and that by referring to themselves as professionals anticipate they will be perceived as such. This could be conceived of as self-owned professionalisation as opposed to that which is directed by the state and is the current case with a number of occupational sectors such as the career sector and further education.

There has been much written (Hodkinson and Issitt, 1995; Totton, 1999; Murphy, 2011), concerning the challenges of what are often considered new professions such as those in the public sector including counselling, social work, and nursing in establishing themselves as professions. In recent years the debate as to what constitutes a profession has intensified as the traditional professions fight to maintain their elite status while new professions debate recognition. The emergence of new professions has resulted from the increases in access to knowledge and technology (Williams, 1998). Increasingly the helping professions fit within the new profession category and, in claiming to have a body of knowledge for their particular occupation, are engaging in professionalisation as the process to drive this.

Although the Careers Profession Task Force (2010) has clearly defined the professionalisation agenda for the career guidance sector, over the past decade or so a number of standards have been introduced. These have included Matrix (2012), which has quality assured adult information, advice and guidance (IAG) provision and a wide range of local quality standards for careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) provision in schools (Andrews, 2011). These standards have been recently added to by a national kite mark the 'Quality in Careers Standard' (Careers England, 2012). As such there has been an agenda for standardisation developed by the sector for the sector. However, awards such as Matrix have increasingly become a contractual compliance requirement, somewhat changing the relationship from sector regulation to funding prerequisite. The professionalisation agenda for the careers sector has most probably been less obvious than for occupations such as nursing and counselling because for most of the first decade of the 21st century the government was attempting to establish a new occupation, namely the 'personal adviser'.

The move to a generic personal advice service as part of the Connexions service and away from a dedicated and named career service has had the biggest impact on the 'profession' as far as young people are concerned. The move to a new 'professional' role becoming a generic personal advice service impacted significantly on training and development for practitioners, specifically with the introduction of the Diploma

for Connexions personal advisers (PA) which was accredited at level 4. The previous Diploma in Careers Guidance was level 6 or 7 (depending on the institution delivering it). This in itself points to the lack of consistency in agreeing the formal qualification level by the awarding body, the Institute of Career Guidance (ICG). Oliver (2004) presents an evaluation of the PA Diploma which was introduced for all Connexions practitioners regardless of their professional background; many of the new practitioners were drawn from teaching, youth work and social work. Oliver (2004) identifies issues for both the students and the trainers in the delivery of a new government service, particularly the gap between the espoused aims of the service and the experienced reality. Colley et al. (2008) describe a research project examining the effect of these changes on the career guidance profession and specifically those career advisers who were re-designated personal advisers.

Colley, Lewin and Chadderton (2010) focus on understanding the roles, identities and practices with specific emphasis on professional expertise within changing communities of practice. This was within a context of reprofessionalisation and/or deprofessionalisation and the repositioning of the profession from career adviser to personal adviser. A major finding from this and other surveys (Bimrose, 2006; Hughes, Hutchinson and Neary-Booth, 2007) is the lack of labour market data available relating to the career sector such as numbers employed, their qualification levels and continuing professional development provision. This raises a fundamental question about the professional status of a sector lacking coherent labour market intelligence about itself. Neary-Booth and Peck (2009) call for this to be addressed. This has so far only happened for the adult sector through Lifelong Learning UK (2009), who undertook an occupational mapping of the sector prior to taking responsibility for the skills development of the career workforce.

The professionalisation of the career sector has become a focused agenda and as a result of the formation of the Careers Profession Task Force, initial training, CPD, professional standards, practitioner registration, a cohesive professional body and chartered status are all being addressed. The Task Force has recommended that a

level 6 Diploma should be the recognised qualification but this should be reviewed in order to adopt a level 7 qualification in the future. This reflects the increase in qualifications levels that have occurred in other allied professions and demonstrates an aspiration to qualification with both minimum and higher qualifications. The issue which is most urgent in relation to this element of professionalisation is the lack of funding to support this both in terms of paying for training and increased salaries to recognise a higher qualified staff. Mulvey (2011a) presents the Task Force recommendations as very much the start of the journey for the professionalisation of the career guidance sector.

The professionalisation process, Evetts (1999) suggests, can take many routes and these may vary depending on the form of work. She proposes that there may be common elements to a number of occupations but others may be unique. The relationships between professional associations and universities are identified as the locus for controlling expertise and accreditation for professionals. It could be argued that the move to a work-based learning qualification for the career guidance sector diluted the traditional relationship between higher education and the awarding body. The awarding body, the Institute of Career Guidance (ICG), no longer had control over the quality of the vocational qualifications delivered and universities no longer have a monopoly over the initial training for the career guidance sector. In contrast, many of the other new helping professions such as nursing have extended initial training grounded in academic disciplines and have become graduate entry and have established research and scholarship to underpin their professionalisation (Williams, 1998). Murphy (2011), when exploring the current professionalisation of counselling and psychotherapy through regulation and standardisation of training, argues that this challenges the professional integrity of the professional and can lead to increased emphasis on the evidence base to support practice. In contrast Muzio (2011) explores occupational groups, such as management consultancy, that have purposely rejected professionalisation in an attempt to increase their market control.

Although many may welcome the professionalisation agenda, in that it is a mechanism to drive change such as new qualifications, investment in CPD, registration and membership of professional bodies. However, workers often perceive these changes as increased work without the corresponding increases in salaries or status (Evetts, 2003b). Change can be driven by the reduction in budgets, increased demands of customers/clients and the introduction of targets and increased regulation. This has been the case within career guidance where all professionalisation activities have been enacted against a background of structural and systemic change (Hooley and Watts, 2011). Professionalisation can therefore be perceived as a positive recognition of the occupational area or as Fournier (1999) considers increasingly as a disciplinary function which may require subordination to practices that may be counterintuitive. Within adult careers work this may be for example the use of action plans as an output measure which links to funding.

Evetts (2003a, 2003b), Aldridge and Evetts (2003) present the concept of the professional as one which is either ideological or normative depending on the extent to which it is influenced internally or externally by the state. McClelland (1990) explores what he refers to as professionalisation from above, which is controlled by the state. This is as opposed to professionalisation from within which is led by the members. The issue with the former focuses on the power of the state to control and manage the professionalisation process; the state can both give it and take it away. This by its very nature leaves professional groups vulnerable and potentially open to manipulation.

Aldridge and Evetts (2003) argue that many occupational areas or new professions are manipulated for managerial purposes through use of the term 'professional'. They suggest that workers are attracted to being perceived as professionals as it provides a form of social capital and the discourse provides a framework of occupational and self-identity for the worker (Aldridge and Evetts, 2003:555). There is thus a great appeal and attraction to being seen as a 'professional'. At the macro level it can be said to provide an ideology and at the micro level a type of

managerialist control. Hoyle and John (1995) suggest that the ideological approach extends the 'symbolism' of profession to deliberately influence policy, such as the existing professionalisation agendas prevalent in both the career and further education sectors. Thus professions can represent an extension of political power and potentially can exist to maintain this, as opposed to the functionalist view, which bestows status in relation to public good. Within much of the career guidance literature practitioners are referred to as professionals, yet there is little other than rhetoric to reinforce this view.

Evetts (1999) considers that in everyday usage 'professionalism' as a term focuses on doing a job well and one that has been guided by ethical codes. This has been perceived as an historical and functionalist viewpoint in relation to the altruistic perception of profession as a concept. Evetts (1999, 2006) argues that professionalism is normative and controls the occupational workforce more efficiently than bureaucracy. Fournier (1999) considers the expansion of professionalism as a means of managing an increasingly flexible workforce. The adoption of professional language in everyday vernacular can be seen as a marketing activity to promote services to potential customers i.e. accessing professional services delivered by professionals. Fournier (1999) would argue, however, that this adoption creates an approach to manage employee autonomy within a context of decentralisation and market realignments. In addition this is also presented as a response to the market and particularly customer needs in supporting a better customer experience combined with quality assurance. Fournier (1999) considers this as an empowerment of the employee with the capacity to have more autonomy and control over their responses in relation to service users. This development in the definition of professional practice reflects public sector views which have redefined clients as customers; this has been particularly evident within the career guidance sector (DBIS, 2010).

The appeal of professionalism acts as a disciplinary mechanism for inscribing professional practice within a network of accountability that establishes connections between other actors (Fournier 1999:302)

Both Fournier (1999) and Evetts (2003a) agree that a definition of professionalism is not fixed and is ahistorical in nature. Increasingly professionalism can be perceived as a socialisation tool for new workers through integrating the organisation's values and expectations in relation to quality and customer care. Felstead et al. (2010) present examples of what they refer to as 'stage managing' the construction of professional identity and the creation of a collective sense of belonging. Both Fournier (1999) and Felstead et al. (2010) reflect the use of professionalism as a concept that is used to control and direct practitioners' work in a subtle yet strategic way as a disciplinary mechanism.

This reflects Foucault's work (1977) which uses training to 'make the individuals' thereby using coercion as a disciplinary power (1977:170). His use of the term 'docile bodies' focuses on this control of development, by manipulating individuals through use, transformation and improvement (1977:136). This paternalistic approach to professionalism offers an interesting departure where this terminology has more usually been considered within the context of the patriarchal nature of the professions. Paternalism offers a more descriptive definition as to the way in which professionalism is increasingly being used to promote occupational change and increased standardisation and control.

Hodkinson and Issitt (1995) refer to helping professions (which could legitimately include career guidance), being specifically state-backed as having engaged in higher education to degree level and beyond, and the rewards encompassing job security and a career ladder. However, unlike many other professions and occupations such as nursing or youth work, an undergraduate degree in career guidance leading to an occupational role has not been available.

2.6 Professional knowledge

Professions are knowledge based occupations and therefore the nature of their knowledge, the socio-cultural evaluation of their knowledge and the occupation's strategies in handling their knowledge are of central importance (Macdonald 1995:160)

Expert knowledge based on a defined body of literature is presented as one of the key criteria used within the characteristics and traits discourse to differentiate a profession from an occupation. Although the differentiation between these two groups may be marginal, as has been discussed above, knowledge and expertise continues to be presented as a key determinant of perceived professionalism. Williams (1998) claims that expert knowledge is the foundation on which professional status is built while linking it to maintenance of power and control. Advice, which is provided by all professionals in one shape or other, is offered on the basis of a claim to specialist knowledge. The question within the career guidance context is what is defined as specialist knowledge.

The Institute of Career Guidance awards the Qualification for Career Guidance (QCG) and the Qualification for Career Guidance and Development in Scotland (QCGD), (ICG, 2013c). Much work has been done on identifying the competencies required within career guidance, which specifically identify the knowledge territories that need to be addressed for a practitioner to be considered competent (Repetto, 2008). The QCG/D qualification defines the 'skill, knowledge and attitudes' that learners should be able to articulate (ICG, 2013c) within 16 learning outcomes. The level 6 Diploma (OCR, 2012) presents knowledge integrated within the learning outcomes. Although these generally cover the same territories it is difficult to define what is the specialist and expert knowledge that is specific to career guidance. Knowledge generally tends to be considered with skills and attitudes and classified as competencies; this reflects the migration of initial training from a higher education base to a work base. Jeffrey and McCrea (2004) argue that the emphasis on competence detracts from developing new knowledge or in fact critiquing existing knowledge. They with Kidd, Killeen, Jarvis and Offer (1994) acknowledge that theoretical knowledge tends to be the weakest element of initial training, which undermines somewhat the argument about a defined body of knowledge that underpins the profession.

The definition of what is considered expert or professional knowledge is discussed by Macdonald (1995) who explores knowledge which is certified and credentialed and

must be awarded by an organisation that has standing. He suggests this differentiation between different knowledge facilitates professional survival. Williams (1998) refers specifically to newer professions such as teaching, social work and nursing as examples who have been seeking recognition of professionalisation through defining a body of theoretical knowledge. This has been extended in initial training which has been grounded in academic disciplines, become graduate entry, gained the removal of unqualified personnel and grown the body of research and scholarship often through the introduction of post graduate/post registration professional development. Larson (1990) considers that certification is the 'central mechanism of professionalisation'. As yet few of the characteristics defined by Williams (1998) can be ascribed to the practice of career guidance.

Knowledge is, however not absolute and in order to consider the epistemological location of this thesis debate is required as to what constitutes specialist knowledge and who defines it. Freidson (1986) refers to professional groups, rather than professionals, who represent bodies of knowledge that claim the right to control particular areas of social policy which affect areas of human life. These professional groups can be formal and informal groups such as communities of practice, professional associations and trade unions. The career guidance sector has been challenged about the number of professional associations it has representing practice (Hughes, Hutchinson and Neary-Booth, 2007; Neary-Booth and Peck, 2009). This has potentially impacted on the ability of external agencies to work with the sector, as they will often be unclear as to which body might be appropriate.

Allied with this Trade Unions have increasingly found a role in the delivery of work-based IAG as part of their learner representative roles but also as a primary campaigning body with the recent cuts affecting Connexions (Hooley and Watts, 2011). As such the 'learning reps' provide a good example of individuals whose substantive role may be very different from their IAG responsibilities. Many of them will have undertaken NVQ qualifications, matrix accreditation and have established communities of practice outside of the professional association. They will have

developed pertinent knowledge and will use this within their working environment to support colleagues' career and learning progression.

What is being presented here is a complex picture of an occupational group that may once have fitted the traditional definitions of a profession. Due to the expansion of the workforce, dilution of qualifications and increased access to information and advice on the Internet, the parameters around what constitutes professional career guidance have become opaque.

As discussed earlier individuals have greater access to information and therefore knowledge and as such this access can be viewed as a challenge to the expert knowledge of the existing professional. This may require justification as to how the knowledge base can change and evolve. This situation provides an argument for professional development as a strategy for ensuring the knowledge base is continually evolving and is effectively communicated amongst professionals.

The claim to specialist knowledge is central, for on it rests the professionals' claim to be qualified to advise, the claim to 'know better' than their clients – hence the claim for autonomy, for being trusted by the public, for reward and prestige (Williams, 1998:72).

Quinn et al. (1996) suggest that the highest levels of professional knowledge should be invested in, but companies more often invest in more functional and systems-based knowledge. Within this viewpoint professional knowledge is defined as professional intellect which they consider provides the greatest professional value, especially to organisations, and as such needs to be constantly updated. The role of professional development is to maintain and enhance this. Professional intellect as defined by Quinn et al (1996) is presented in four levels described in Figure 2.1.

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Figure 2.1 Professional intellect

These four levels demonstrate progression in learning and exemplify basic knowledge levels through creative approaches to practice. Quinn et al. (1996) suggest that through nurturing professionals to achieve the highest level they will have a greater impact on their organisation.

The true professional commands a body of knowledge – a discipline that must be updated constantly (Quinn et al., 1996:72)

This concept of creativity as the highest level of professional knowledge has also been extolled by King (1998) who promotes the concept of ‘professional artistry.’ She suggests that through supporting professionals to be creative in their practice they are better able to understand, explain and develop practice. The concepts of artistry and creativity in professional practice have also been considered within career guidance literature. Hambly (2002) draws on work by Schön (1983) to consider the professional career practitioner developing an artistic approach to their work. This is defined as one where the practitioner is able to move beyond their technical competence developed through training to adopt a more artistic approach to practice. This evolves as a result of engagement with knowledge, experimentation and theory. Hambly (2002) does, however, acknowledge that this is the exceptional practitioner as opposed to the norm and as such it is an aspiration within professional practice.

Eraut (1994) analyses what constitutes professional knowledge and considers this as two interrelated issues, the role of theory and the generalisability of practical knowledge (1994:43). Theory he suggests has limitations in that it may be acquired during initial training and may be ‘stored’ as it is but may be difficult to use in that practitioners need to be willing to use theory and see the relevance for practice. Within the context of career work Kidd, Killeen, Jarvis and Offer (1994) conducted research with career advisers to examine their use of theory within their practice. Their findings, although queried by Bimrose and Bayne (1995), suggest that

practitioners who have recently engaged with initial training have a greater familiarity with theory and this influences their practice. However, they also acknowledge that there is a lack of integration between theory and practice, particularly in initial training, which results in an eclectic approach to practice. Their findings also suggest that career practitioners have a greater interest in guidance models that define a theoretical approach to practice rather than theoretical constructs which consider the nature of career development. Bimrose and Bayne (1995) are highly critical of this research on a number of levels; most specifically they perceive the research as presenting an argument for reducing the need for theory within training for career practitioners.

Harrison et al. (2001) suggest that practice has been developed as a polarisation against theory and that a set of binary distinctions have been created; theory and practice, knowledge and competence and academic and vocational. They argue that getting on with the 'job' has become the predominant professional philosophy and that theory is considered unrealistic in relation to practice. Collin (1998) argues that practical theory should be included within all initial training and that practitioners understand the relationship between practice and theory, but suggests that the translation of theory into practice is not always easy. Douglas (2004) argues that both practitioners and managers within the career sector should have a strong theoretical base within their professional development. She argues that through theory practitioners can have a 'knowledgeable, informed voice'. This, she suggests, makes individuals 'professional' regardless of whether they are a member of a profession.

Erkut (1994) also suggests that the use of theoretical knowledge is dependent on how that knowledge was introduced, the work context and professional issues. In relation to practical knowledge he argues that much of this is developed experientially and the knowledge is considered, generalised and allied to the new situation. This argument would support the role of socialisation and communities of practice in that individuals are encouraged to engage in development of this nature as a result of role models they may wish to emulate. Douglas (2011) challenges that

there are few role models of this type within career guidance practice. For career guidance the term 'competency' would appear to have greater currency with practitioners than terms such as expert or specialist knowledge.

2.7 Competence

The issues of credentialism, whereby workers are certified to undertake the work they do, and the extent to which professions have defined and controlled this, have contributed to the establishment of monopoly and power within various professions. Macdonald (1995) suggests that in the modern world claims to professionalism need to be underpinned by explicit credentials. These in turn need to be awarded by organisations and institutions that have recognised standing. Eraut (1994) notes a transition whereby competence defined by professionals and used to control their professional status is being supplanted by governments defining competence through licensing.

This control over both the market and the ownership of knowledge as a mechanism for restricting entrance to the profession reflects a Foucauldian perspective on regulation concerning who can become a professional within the field and who can give themselves a particular job title. Control of the discourse both in terms of who creates it, who can access it and who can use it supports the view of the professionalisation project as defined by Larson (1977) as a vehicle for creating the circumstances to control the discourse.

In recent decades the need to standardise and codify knowledge has become increasingly important within areas of training and development (Eraut, 1994). This behaviourist approach, whereby observations and measurement have dominated training and assessment, has increasingly dominated North American and Western approaches to professional training. Specifically the introduction of competency based education programmes for teacher training in North America has had significant influence (Eraut, 1994). Within the UK the establishment of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) as a result of the 1985-6 Review of Vocational Qualifications in England and Wales was intended to develop and

implement a qualifications framework that would assess individual competencies (Williams and Raggatt, 1999). Field (1999) is another commentator who considers the extent to which professional level qualifications have been affected by the move to take up competence-based and vocational qualifications. He concludes that generally take-up has been low; the exceptions to this have been in the public sector where demand started to rise from the mid 1990s. Wolf (2002) suggests that a major issue for the vocational awards was their lack of credibility and their focus on 'trivial skills at the expense of knowledge and theory' (2002:80). This issue has recently been resurrected by Wolf (2011) who suggests that a significant number of vocational courses have little or no market value. This view has since been adopted by the government, which has removed the GCSE equivalency of over 3000 vocational awards (DfE, 2012).

This paradigm shift from professional knowledge being esoteric in nature and defined solely by the profession to a systematic and codified knowledge base has had a considerable impact, specifically on many of the new professions such as teaching. Hodkinson (1995) challenges the systematised approach to knowledge, particularly in relation to the caring professions. The managerialist approach to competence in particular develops performance standards which are defined by lead bodies. He suggests that this 'top-down managerialism' combined with assessment processes has been utilised to check practice but in reality it often isolates practitioners, as the responsibility is placed solely on the practitioner.

This underestimates the importance of collaborative and collective versions of competence, ignores power inequalities and (micro-) political struggles which have a major impact on the nature of professional provision, deflects attention from problems of context and makes it easy to blame the individual professional for any shortcoming within the system (Hodkinson, 1995:61)

Hodkinson (1995) argues that being a professional requires the practitioner to develop expertise in order to provide a high quality service, which empowers clients to be able to make choices. Fournier (1999) perceives accountability and competence to be inextricably linked.

Competence embodies the government of truth and inscribes professional conduct within a network of accountability to clients and to the profession itself. Through the delineation of competence the professions are made accountable to their constituency for the proper use and production of 'truth' (Fournier, 1999:286)

Much of the debate concerning competence is defined by a managerialist discourse as opposed to practitioner discourse, which requires independence and the ability to grow professionally. Jeffrey and McCrea (2004) consider this within the context of career guidance training and especially competence-based training, and the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) in particular, which they suggest limit the extent to which practitioners can affect change through reflective, creative and collaborate practice.

The adoption of the National Vocational Qualification system to provide a work-based route in parallel with the Qualification in Career Guidance delivered in higher education institutions has created significant tension for the career guidance community (Jeffrey and McCrea, 2004). However, there are arguments on both sides of the divide, supporting accessibility through the work place and professional credibility on the other (Neary-Booth, 2006). Much has been written concerning the impact of competence-based qualifications in relation to professional practice within career guidance (Hambly, 2002; Jeffrey and McCrea, 2004; Bimrose 2006; CEDEFOP, 2009; Sultana, 2009). The concept of competence would therefore appear to be more accessible to academic writers within the career guidance literature, evidencing perhaps that competence is a more accessible concept than expert knowledge. Within England a number of policy reviews have been commissioned including those conducted by the Skills Commission (2008), and the Careers Profession Task Force (2010). They have maintained that the NVQ pathway has had a detrimental effect on practice within career guidance. There have been similar claims in relation to the HE qualification route; that the Qualification in Career Guidance is questionable in its fitness for purpose in supporting individuals to undertake their role competently. These views would imply therefore that initial training, whether through a vocational or an academic route, does not suitably equip

practitioners with the skills and knowledge to effectively undertake the roles required.

Over recent years there has been much progress in the UK and Europe to develop and enhance existing occupational approaches to competency within career guidance. In the UK, a suite of new vocational qualifications has been developed together with new National Occupational Standards (Lifelong Learning UK, 2011). CEDEFOP (2009) define the knowledge required by career practitioners as propositional knowledge (knowing that), practical knowledge (knowing how) and procedural knowledge (knowing how to be). This knowledge is captured within a competence framework which has been developed to define and standardise the knowledge and understanding of practitioners across Europe. They adopt the definition of the European Commission (2005)

Competence includes: (i) cognitive competence involving the use of theory and concepts, as well as informal tacit knowledge gained experientially; (ii) functional competence (skills or know-how), those things that a person should be able to do when they are functioning in a given area of work, learning or social activity; (iii) personal competence involving knowing how to conduct oneself in a specific situation; and (iv) ethical competence involving the possession of certain personal and professional values (CEDEFOP, 2009:66)

Although this move to standardisation offers an opportunity to adopt a more structured approach to training and development more inclusive of theoretical concepts, there is still criticism as to the benefits. Hiebert (2009) suggests the use of a competency framework rather than a training-based approach, as this is more inclusive of the wide range of experiences that many individuals bring when joining the profession. This recognises that for many career work is unlikely to be their first career. Hiebert (2009) argues there is no universal meaning for terms such as competence and competent. He suggests that what is important is differentiation; different training to meet different client needs. Sultana (2009) suggests that competency frameworks can be useful to support the development of training programmes and skill analysis. Within the context of the development of a framework for career guidance he suggests it can be helpful to classify the nature of

knowledge and its relationship with the other elements of practice. This then defines the concepts that underpin career guidance. He warns that competency frameworks can be fragmentary in relation to tasks and define good practice by institutional criteria whereby the socialisation and the human element may be lost. Additionally the creative nature of practice can be stifled particularly if practitioners are trained in a mechanical way. Jeffrey and McCrea (2004) also support this stance and suggest that technical rational approaches to training inhibit creativity and as such the opportunities to experiment and learn from mistakes become discouraged. They suggest that within professional knowledge the ability to work creatively and imaginatively should be valued, thus supporting Quinn et al. (1996) and their depiction of professional intellect.

Friedman and Phillips (2004) within their research explore the relationship between competence and CPD. They acknowledge the debate concerning the various definitions around CPD and that it is used interchangeably to describe activities which support personal development, skills growth for economic competitiveness and as a form of social control within the workplace. Their study presents conflicting views that competence and CPD are separate and perform different functions. They suggest that competence is important but should be separated from CPD, which should primarily focus on learning. The feedback from professionals within their study suggests that competence is better measured through processes such as peer review and observation of practice. The relationship between CPD and competence is therefore not a clear one and is likely to be defined differently within different occupations and their associated professional bodies.

Foucault (1978) would argue that competence is not just about specialist knowledge but also about the personal characteristics of the individual and how they conduct themselves within the professional role. This may be defined by an ethical framework and professional parameters. The role of competence is therefore used to satisfy government/society/professional bodies that individual practitioners are appropriately qualified to practice in their name.

2.8 Continuing professional development (CPD)

Within all the definitions and discussions that consider profession and professionalism as a concept, there is general agreement that continuing professional development is a core element. Postle, Edwards, Moon, Rumsey and Thomas (2002) consider CPD as the link between the theoretical knowledge developed in initial professional education (IPE) and the experience developed in the work environment. Peel (2005) presents CPD as being the pivotal activity in ensuring credibility and professional validity for professional bodies. Within the context of the career workforce Mulvey (2011b) considers it as a moral duty and part of the ethics that frame professional practice.

Initial education and training alone can never be sufficient to ensure a professional practitioner continues to be up to date in their field. This is obviously more important in certain fields such as clinical and pharmaceutical occupations. Evetts (1999) suggests that CPD is an important requirement for all professional practitioners and is co-ordinated by professional associations. However, within many fields such as careers work this continues to be a voluntary activity and one which has not been prescribed but recommended. Fournier (1999) describes how professional values and behaviours are enclosed within the competence framework. Implicit within this is the commitment to professional and personal development. Within professional development practitioners need to be both reflective, whereby they are able to reconceptualise and address problems through analysis of prior experience (Schön, 1983), and reflexive in understanding the context and its influence on their practice and those they work with (Reid and Bassot, 2011).

Eraut (1994) suggests that professionals need to engage in continuous learning, as the knowledge base is rarely static. This combines with the nature of practice evolving and the need to work with new problems and casework. He goes on to differentiate between what he refers to as continuing professional education (CPE), which defines activities such as conferences and courses that are formally organised: and to continuing professional development (CPD) which is inclusive of these activities but also includes work-based learning. Douglas (2004) differentiates clearly

between what she considers CPD and workplace learning: the latter she defines as having the skills and knowledge to undertake changed roles and responsibilities to achieve business outcomes. She suggests that work-based learning is not about self-development.

CPD needs to be something owned by the individual, aligning them with their profession, rather than solely to the organisation's business objectives (Douglas, 2004:27)

Friedman and Philips (2004) are less convinced of these definitions and they suggest that although all professional associations promote CPD there is confusion around what defines it and therefore they consider it as an ambiguous concept. They present research that explores attitudes to CPD from professionals and their employers. They identify a number of key issues including lack of definition, who benefits and the lack of a direct link between CPD and competence. Through analysis of literature produced by professional associations they conclude that CPD reflects a number of purposes including personal development, public assurance and verification of standards and competence. Some of the professionals themselves, however, considered it as something that needed to be done to keep up to date either formally or informally. Peel (2005) agrees that CPD is a contested concept but suggests that it contributes to emerging professional identities combined with socialisation to the profession.

CPD has both a societal and an individual dimension, and can offer an important vehicle and record for assuring one's professional competence and capacity with respect to particular professional associations (Peel, 2005:126)

This lack of clarity as to the benefits and purpose of CPD provides an opportunity to discuss this within the context of career guidance. Both Bimrose (2004) and Mulvey (2004) suggest that lifelong learning has still to be enthusiastically embraced while CPD is still emerging within career guidance. The OECD (2004) suggests in a review of participation in CPD activities within career guidance that participation rates vary between 100% and 10% and was optional in most countries. CEDEFOP (2009) also confirm this and suggest there was little evidence of countries within the EU having

‘sound systems for CPD’, however they do acknowledge more opportunities for professional development exist through masters level degrees.

Within the UK specifically, Bimrose (2006) criticises the career sector as it has responsibility for promoting career progression and development, yet fails to promote this within its own occupation. She questions the future of a profession with a fragile occupational identity, inadequate initial training and CPD requiring strengthening. Douglas (2004) suggests that career guidance has struggled to assert itself as a profession. As a result of this government policy has impacted rapidly on practice, requiring professionals to be reactive to change without having the opportunity to consider the wider implications. Douglas refers to this as ‘adapting practice in a piecemeal way to fit the needs of the moment’ (2004:24), resulting in practice being dominated by central policy concerned more with measurements of outcomes. Douglas (2004) questions within this context the rationale for practitioners and their managers to be concerned about professionalism and professional development. Greer (2009) similarly argues that the sector is underpinned by ‘internal shortcomings and external conflicts’. He suggests that career practitioners question whether they can be called professionals and that within his study many practitioners were neither members of a profession association nor saw the benefits of belonging to one.

The Skills Commission (2008), followed by the Careers Profession Task Force (2010), both identified that CPD for the career guidance sector was in need of a radical overhaul. Both reports specifically called for a system of accredited CPD. The Careers Profession Task Force has taken this further by recommending that a commitment to CPD needs to be demonstrated and it goes so far as to identify some of the topic areas that should be addressed including developing practice around labour market information, ICT and science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM). Interestingly these all focus on developing knowledge around information rather than defining areas of professional practice such as theoretical knowledge or developing higher level skills.

LLUK (2009) report that 19.4% of the career workforce included in their survey had engaged with job-related training over the previous month. Although this suggests that some form of CPD is occurring there were significant discrepancies across the UK, with practitioners in London receiving on average 10% more than other parts of the UK. These figures, although useful as a snapshot, need to be considered with caution as they focus on a very small window of time which may not be representative of practitioners' general experience of training and development.

Friedman and Phillips (2004) emphasise that CPD is increasingly the responsibility of the individual and not the employer. This supports Watkins' (1999) view, who suggests that because employment is insecure employers should not be expected to provide professional development and that the individual should take responsibility for this. Mulvey (2004) introduces a dichotomy between individual and employer-led CPD. She suggests that if it is individual led, they will identify areas of practice that are underdeveloped and therefore will be more motivated to address them. If however if it is employer-led this will often be integrated within bureaucratic mechanisms such as annual reviews. She suggests that most practitioner development needs do not fit easily within these types of systems. Mulvey (2004) identifies a number of major issues in relation to mandatory professional development including trusting members in recording CPD and the administration of sanctions if this does not occur. More interestingly perhaps is the issue of quality and the extent to which CPD can be measured, specifically the relative values of differing activities. Can varying learning processes be differentiated and quantified to evidence enhanced practices? This argument can be extended further in examining the engagement of the practitioner where attendance does not equate to learning. Mulvey (2004) suggests that it is the reflexivity, ownership and articulation of learning which is most important. CPD therefore is both an individual and an organisational need. The opportunities to meet CPD requirements need to be considered within the context of the individual's work environment and their preferred approach to learning and development. Therefore the benefits to

practitioners within the guidance sector require a clear rationale as to why CPD is fundamentally important to their pretensions to professional status.

2.9 Reflection

The role of reflection in underpinning professional practice (Goodson and Hargreaves, 2003; Jeffrey and McCrea, 2004; Peel, 2005) has been strongly influenced by the work of Schön (1983). Schön's (1983, 1987) representations of reflection on-action and reflection in-action have significantly influenced approaches and definitions of reflection within a professional practice context, Boyd and Fales (1983), Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985), Moon (1999, 2004) and Johns (2004). All present a range of interpretations of reflection which incorporate concepts of learning through experience, applying purpose and processing problems that appear to have no clear solution. This interpretive approach to practice supports the notion or belief in the autonomy of the professional and the view that individuals develop subjective meaning for their experiences that are used to further and enhance practice. These subjective views have been formed as a result of their experiences encountered through initial training, CPD, their area of expertise and their praxis (Eraut, 1994).

Reflection is often referred to within the literature as a core element of professional practice; however Boud et al. (1985) and Russell (2005) query the extent to which reflection is acted on by professionals. Karseth and Nerland (2007) present a teachers' union's commitment to the development of 'professional awareness' in partnership with a commitment to reflection as a duty of their professional practice. However, when considering informal CPD in particular in the form of reflection, Friedman and Phillips (2004) are concerned that the emphasis on credentialisation impacts on the extent to which reflection is considered a development activity. However, they also deduce from their study the importance of the reflective practitioner and that this should be integral within all CPD programmes and policies.

Reflection is presented as an approach to learning and professional development which allows the integration of academic knowledge with experience to produce a form of contextualised, practical knowledge (Harrison et al., 2001:205)

Harrison et al. (2001) and Mulvey (2004) have made the links with concrete examples of reflection contributing to professional development activities for career practitioners. Harrison et al. (2001) specify that within professional practice the need to analyse and interpret situations contributes to the approaches adopted. Mulvey (2004) focuses on reflective practice contributing to the virtuous circle which facilitates learning informing future practice. Bimrose (2004) supports reflection as being of particular importance for guidance practitioners and suggests that it is not a lack of interest by employers but an inability to ring fence time for reflection that is more of an issue. This has been addressed within some areas of the sector; for example the careers services delivered through the national telephone helpline in England have provided career advisers with time for reflection (Neary-Booth, Morgan, Hambly, Christopoulos and Dyke 2008). The new qualifications for the career guidance sector, the Career Information and Advice Diploma Level 4 and the Career Guidance and Development Diploma Level 6 both have reflective practice and CPD units as mandatory units (OCR, 2012). This will potentially raise awareness of both reflective practice and its relationship with CPD.

Eraut (1994) also suggests that less emphasis is put on experiential knowledge with the result that greater value is attributed to new knowledge. He also questions some of that new knowledge and its purpose. More commonly CPD is used to support new aspects of work or changes within the organisation. This contributes to the debate in focusing on issues of formalised and informal CPD and the differentiation between continuing professional education and continuing professional development. Shaw and Green (1999) propose that much CPD has become employer driven and its primary function is often the immediate up-skilling of the workforce through training activities. This suggests reactive approaches around perception by managers of what CPD needs to happen, based on external stimuli rather than by practitioner need. When considering the role of the employing organisation within up-skilling of the workforce, the term CPD may be problematic. Staff development may offer a better term as this locates the development more specifically within the employer domain

focused on meeting the needs of the individual but more specifically as part of the dynamic changes within the organisation (O'Brien and MacBeath, 1999).

2.10 Professional associations

Watkins (1999) suggests that the term 'professional association' is difficult to define as it is used by a widely diverse range of professional groups. He suggests four key features that professional associations will have; entry barriers, a register of members, a code of conduct and systems to maintain standards and quality. Within the career guidance sector all of these requirements are a little unclear; some of the professional associations within the sector may lay claim to these but there is a lack of standardisation. Freidson (1986) credits the formal organisation of professional associations as being instrumental in collectively representing the interests of members within both the lay and political arenas. Although, as cited above by Watkins (1999), professional associations have codes of conduct, Freidson (1986) challenges that few have the power to address violations through taking action against members.

Their approach to promoting both the credibility and control of members has increasingly been through credentialisation and professional development activities. Watkins (1999) describes how the role of professional associations has evolved to take a key role in supporting the membership to effectively manage changes in working practices. This development in knowledge and practice is also set within an ideology of life-long learning. Friedman and Phillips (2004) refer extensively to the 'learning society' but consider this concept nebulous as it is used and promoted by a range of interest groups. They present a range of objectives for this learning from establishing a learning market for economic competitiveness to creating learning networks which facilitate individuals and groups to pursue similar goals.

Karseth and Nerland (2007) suggest that professional associations have become the 'critical agents of knowledge' (2007:336). They have taken on the mantle of facilitating and supporting members in accessing and making sense of abstract knowledge to enable them to stay up to date. Conversely Peel (2005) considers that professional associations maintain their credibility through having such a role. This

suggests a symbiotic relationship where both the professional association and its members are equally inter-dependent. The views of members, however, in relation to the provision of professional development are varied. Watkins (1999) defines CPD within the professional association context as

updating, maintaining and enhancing the skills and knowledge gained in the initial training (Watkins, 1999:66)

Mulvey sees it as more profound than this

For those who do qualify and engage in autonomous professional practice, the realisation dawns that qualifying is not the point of arrival, but the point of departure (Mulvey, 2004:12)

Watkins (1999) suggests that associations have always depended on practitioners taking responsibility for their professional development as an ethical and moral element of their professionalism. From the late 1970s this division of responsibility started to change as professional associations focused on the development of CPD strategies. The majority of professional associations have increasingly adopted this approach resulting in the development of records and portfolios of individual development, the provision of courses and stress on publications. Watkins (1999) suggests that although professional associations have focused on this in the past, practitioners often have a limited interest in formal CPD activities i.e. courses and qualifications attract only 10-20% of members. He suggests that a major issue for associations is being required to prove the benefits of CPD to members. This contradicts Friedman and Phillips (2004) who argue that professionals within their study perceived CPD as a fundamental activity. For legally regulated professions, CPD is a compulsory activity, managed by the professional associations. For other associations the compulsory route has created much tension with members who have felt their professional autonomy being compromised (Watkins, 1999; Friedman and Phillips, 2004; Mulvey 2004).

Within the career guidance sector the professional associations have supported and promoted CPD to members through formal activities such as conferences and regional meetings. Although there is a commitment to CPD and examples of

activities are offered, clear definitions of CPD have been somewhat lacking. The Institute of Career Guidance (2012) differentiates between formal CPD such as courses and conferences and informal CPD which includes reading and work shadowing. National Association of Educational Guidance for Adults (NAEGA, 2007) integrates CPD within the Principles of Ethical Practice and defines it as 'skills and knowledge that are relevant, accurate and up to date' but does not offer a definition as to what defines CPD. Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS, 2012) offers a CPD scheme for members and a programme of training, conferences and resources to support this. It could be suggested that, although there is much emphasis on CPD within the professional associations, this focuses on activities and the rationale for engaging in CPD. There is limited engagement in educating members as to different types of CPD and the potential benefits of a variety of approaches.

Friedman, Durkan and Phillips (2000) consider the costs of CPD and particularly the question of who pays. They also consider the issue of motivation for CPD and agree with Watkins (1999) that professional associations need to sell the benefits of CPD. However, there was recognition of the opportunity costs of CPD and as such many employers were reluctant to release staff within working hours to engage in CPD activities. This debate reflects Mulvey's (2004) work in considering the beneficiaries of CPD whom she defines as the practitioner, their employer, the professional association and the client. Friedman, Durkan and Phillips (2000) argue that the benefits to the government and the employing organisations are greatest; therefore they should bear the costs. Within the Career Guidance sector the Careers Profession Task Force (2010) recommended that the professional associations work more closely together. The future aim of this was to establish a single recognised professional association for the whole sector. The Career Development Institute (CDI) was established in 2013.

2.11 Masters as a form of CPD

There is limited research as to the benefits and value of engaging in masters level study within career guidance or education literature. As a result the literature review

has been extended to consider academic publications focusing on other 'new' professions within the 'helping' sphere. Hodkinson (1995) argues that a professional approach to teaching, social work and other similar roles is based on the principles of service to others, striving for expertise, empowerment and the adoption of a moral code. These new and emerging professions have staked claims as professions in parallel to the decline of unquestioning status and privilege of the elite professions. According to Watkins (1999) both the current Standard Occupational Classification and the then Department for Education and Employment define a professional as one who has a minimum of a degree level qualification. Health and social care in particular have increased their initial training qualifications to degree level but are increasingly promoting masters level study for higher level practice (Caldwell, 2001; Kell, 2006). Caldwell (2001) suggests that entry to many occupational areas now require degree level qualifications and as such there is a greater demand for professional development at postgraduate level. She asserts that the domains within postgraduate professional practice study for her area focus on intellectual, politico-economic, psychosocial, professional and ideological themes. These therefore provide a useful comparison for other evolving professional groupings such as career work.

2.12 Motivations for professional postgraduate level study

Swain and Hammond (2011) suggest there has been little research or policy interest in part-time mature student learning within higher education, yet between 2008-9 over half of postgraduate level awards were taken on a part-time basis. Within a postgraduate professional development context motivation for engagement according to Kell (2006) focuses on postgraduate level study providing participants with more sophisticated lifelong learning skills such as critical thinking, individual management of learning, but moreover a qualification that offers greater professional standing. Swain and Hammond (2011) suggest that adult learning generally is deemed to bring benefits in terms of self-fulfilment, health, civic participation and social attitudes. These can lead to various forms of enhanced capital defined by Bourdieu as social, cultural, symbolic and potentially leading to increased economic capital (Jenkins, 1992). For these forms of capital Bourdieu

(1986) argues that each can be converted into economic acquisition as well as being institutionalised in the form of educational qualifications for cultural capital and social connections for social capital. These suggest that motivations may be multiple and return multiple forms of capital as a reward.

There are many and varied definitions of motivation; Swain and Hammond (2011) select 'underlying reasons and learner engagement' as a broad definition within their research. This definition would tend to support the examination of motivation within the context of this study. They suggest motivations for study therefore can be multiple; incorporating both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, these being defined as the personal interest the individual has as opposed to external rewards as a result of engagement. Kember, Hong and Ho (2008) explore these motivations within the context of higher education and regard these as polar opposites. They examined the role of vocational motivation in addition to these and suggested that the careers construct could be considered both intrinsic and extrinsic in terms of motivation in relation to immediate end goal and long-term career development opportunities. This is also supported by Smitina (2010) who defined motivations for study which were based on personal interest, career orientation and external influences. Those who had a clear sense of their motivations were likely to be successful on their programmes.

Feinstein, Anderson, Hammond, Jamieson and Woodley (2007) consider that motivations vary, depending at which stage of life the learner is at. Their study suggested employment and career progression as dominant factors for some students, particularly those who had extensive caring responsibilities. Swain and Hammond (2011) defined 'proving to oneself' as a specific motivation within the range of personal development as a key motivational driver for students within their study. Arthur, Marland, Pill and Rea (2006) explored postgraduate professional development for teachers. For the participants in their study, the achievement of an award was of significant importance. Motivations for engaging with study ranged from professional development, school responsibilities to personal interest. Those

who were motivated by personal interest also felt the achievement of a recognised award as important.

Shaw and Green (1999) review continuing professional development within the context of lifelong learning. For the individual, learning is more than just about employment but about intellectual knowledge and personal fulfilment through learner ownership. As professionals there is an expectation that as students they will be highly motivated as learners and have a desire to engage in a more abstract experience than would be available at undergraduate level. Therefore the experience provides a confluence of professional practice with academic learning. The motivations for choosing to engage in study within a higher education environment and as a form of professional development are varied and diverse.

2.13 Benefits of masters level learning

Whyte, Lugton and Fawcett (2000) and Richardson (2004) identify in their respective studies of masters programmes within the health care sector a wide range of benefits. Whyte et al. (2000) present a longitudinal study of postgraduate nursing courses while Richardson (2004) focuses on on-line masters. Both studies generally concur that a deeper understanding of their occupational area was felt to raise participants' awareness of themselves as a professional. Critical thinking, problem solving and confidence all contributed to a feeling of empowerment, which facilitated their growth as both learners and professionals. Much of what they learned they were able to implement within their working practice. This in turn contributed to a stronger sense of being more skilled and reflective.

Key attributes of masters courses are seen as promoting a critical attitude, a deep approach to learning, a creative approach to practice based specialist knowledge, a teaching role and an ability to inform, undertake and implement research (Whyte et al., 2000:1073)

Students at the end of their programme in Richardson's (2004) research had felt themselves to be more reflective, analytical and confident in their professional role. In addition many had taken on new areas of responsibility with local and national leadership roles. They felt empowered to do this as a result of both their increased

confidence and critical thinking developed through scholarly activity and research. In exploring 'capital' as an outcome for learning and engaging in their study Swain and Hammond (2011) identified a number of inter-related aspects of capital; professional capital (skills which can be used in professional life); economic capital, personal capital (attitudes, aspirations and dispositions) and social capital. They suggested that there were considerable capital gains for students, but were unable to identify the sustainability of these without longitudinal research.

Career development was also recognised by Whyte et al. (2000) who suggested that engaging in this level of study opened up career opportunities for participants, many of whom had gone into teaching or senior posts. They suggest that many specifically chose the qualification to facilitate access to higher education career opportunities. The majority of students in their study felt the programme had contributed within their work environment. They were able to evidence examples of being more aware of relevant research, being able to assess complex situations and have a more strategic approach to their practice.

Richardson (2004) refers to what she terms transformational learning which contributes to how students perceive themselves.

Students felt that they had integrated their academic experiences into a personal and professional identity that was more reflective, analytical and confident than when they had entered the programme (Richardson, 2004:113)

Within a career guidance context, work by Harrison et al. (2001) explores the impact of a masters level module in 'Guidance and Counselling for Learning' delivered through distance learning. Within their study a number of similar issues were identified including the importance of reflection. However, their study unlike others (Whyte et al., 2000; Richardson, 2004) includes participants without either formal qualifications or training within their occupational area. Their findings suggest that participants valued the programme as a means to validate their practice, making up for the lack of formal qualifications. They refer to 'naming' which allows participants to 'understand their field of practice, their roles within it and how these are subject

to change through learning' (2001:200). Fundamentally they found that participants think differently about their role, have a more critical understanding and have developed knowledge to complement their practical skills. Mulvey (2004) and CEDEFOP (2009) acknowledge that as CPD has become more formalised there has been an increased emphasis on formal accreditation of professional learning in the form of masters degrees and doctorates. These have been used to provide access to higher levels of membership and recognition within certain professional associations, although this is not currently the case within career guidance but it may be at a future point.

CPD represents a key theme throughout the discussions around the notion of the professional, the professionalisation process and the functions of the organisations that represent professional groups. These concepts contribute to the formation of the practitioner professional identity and therefore can lead to addressing this concept in more depth.

2.14 Professional identity and career practitioners

This section considers the literature exploring definitions of professional identity. It considers the factors that contribute to its formation and how literature relating to the career sector reflects that of other occupational areas.

Career identity focuses on self-reflection to identify suitable career choices.

Meijers (1998) defines career identity as:

A structure of meanings in which the individual links their motivations, interests and competencies within acceptable career roles (Meijers 1998:191)

This suggests that career identity is formed through the relationship between self and possible career opportunities available. Meijers and Lengelle (2012) extend this and consider career identity as focusing on life themes within a specific occupation. This locates the definition closer to concepts of 'professional identity' and 'occupational identity'. These terms refer to the role in which the individual is located and will be explored more fully. These terms often appear interchangeable within the literature: Aldridge and Evetts (2003) and Bimrose (2006) use both terms

within the same context. Professional identity is the term adopted in this study as the debate is centred on the professionalisation of career guidance and the perceptions of the study participants in relation to this.

Professional identity commands as many definitions and descriptions as the concept of profession. Attempting to define professional identity is complex. Beijaard, Verloop and Vermunt (2004) consider professional identity can be defined in different ways but they regard it as having three principal domains; self-concept and image of self; the occupational role; and expectations of others and accepted images within society as to what the occupation should know and do. This trio provide a useful model to explore the factors that contribute to the issue of professional identity. Identity is however, perceived as a 'relational phenomenon' (2004:108) and is significantly influenced by the extent to which the perceptions and views of others hold a key role. This is also underpinned by the individual's practical experience and their personal background.

Ibarra (1999) considers professional identity to be a combination of:

Attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences in terms of which individuals define themselves within their professional role (Ibarra, 1999:765)

Ibarra (1999) suggests that professional identity evolves through socialisation within the work environment, which requires the observation of identified role models. Professional identity is created through experimentation with the 'provisional' self, which is then retained or discarded depending on the external feedback received. This model focuses on a formative approach, which is influenced by experiences and feedback.

Alternatively Smitina (2010) considers professional identity within the context of the professional role; 'who I am as a professional, what would I like to be and how did I become the professional I am' (2010:1141). Her definition assumes more of a reflective domain whereby individuals focus internally on the contributing factors. Evetts (2003) suggests that the essence of professional identity lies in the common

shared experiences of practitioners. The professional identity therefore can become compromised if these collective experiences become undermined. In support of this Brown (2002) and Beijaard et al. (2004) argue that professional identity is an important facet in times of change and transition. Commonality is therefore a key concept that defines the relationship between practitioners, their colleagues and their work environment.

2.14.1 Formation of professional identity

The definitions presented earlier explore the development of professional identity through socialisation and individual agency. These consider the extent to which external views influence and contribute to the individual's view of themselves from a professional practice perspective. From the discourse presented earlier in relation to the use of professionalisation as a managerial device, Fournier (1999) makes much of terms such as professional service, expert practice and a range of other terminology aimed at promoting professional expectation. She considers it a device adopted to attract consumers. Felstead et al. (2010) focus specifically on the role of employers promoting and creating a defined professional identity for their staff through stage-managing the formation of a professional identity with uniforms and corporate imagery. Evetts (2003b) suggests that professionalism offers a mechanism for promoting social and occupational change and has specifically been used as a mechanism for professionalising service workers through increased occupational training and certification. She continues that this often results in occupational identity crises where workers in the midst of professionalisation become discontented; this is particularly common in caring roles. This has been identified within the careers context by Colley et al. (2010) who suggests the professional capacity of Connexions personal advisers has been undermined particularly by a lack of specialist career guidance training.

Lawrence (1992) challenges decisions to change career guidance practices which are intended to focus on meeting the needs of policy and bureaucracy in the market. These changes, he suggests, could subvert practitioner ethics and their professional

identity. He raises concerns that changes in work emphasis away from vocational guidance with young people towards a more focused 'placing role' with employers could compromise the client focus view of their work. Within this context practitioners expressed concern as to the loss of their independence and being defined as civil servants; all considered themselves as professionals.

It was not only politicisation and loss of independence that the officers feared would undermine their professional role if they became agency officials or civil servants. Another fear was the changes would lead to the introduction of a bureaucratic form of organisation (Lawrence, 1992:269)

Lawrence's concerns from the 1990s would almost appear prophetic, with many of the issues becoming day-to-day reality for practitioners in the 21st century. Bimrose (2004, 2006) presents the view that occupational identity is one of the most important of our multiple identities. She suggests that this is informed and influenced within communities of practice but that they exist outside of formal employment activities. The broadening of the careers sector to incorporate a wide range of practitioners has resulted in a distinct lack of a 'unified professional identity'. Douglas (2009b) suggests the career profession lacks many of the external professional standards and regulations that contribute to professional identity within other occupational areas. Lawrence (1992), Bimrose (2004, 2006), Douglas (2009a), Colley et al. (2010) all consider professional identity to have been severely influenced by policy and practice priorities.

2.14.2 Professional identity of careers practitioners

More recently professional identity as a theme within careers work would appear to have had a resurgence with extensive research projects being conducted by Colley et al. (2009, 2010), Lewin and Colley (2011) and Douglas (2009a, 2010). These have been driven by the lack of research and understanding of the changing roles and identities of careers advisers and the social and policy contexts in which they work. Within England, Colley et al. (2010) and Lewin and Colley (2011) explored the impact of careers practitioners working with 14-19 year olds in relation to changing policy agendas. They concluded that the introduction of Connexions had significantly

impacted on the professional capacity of practitioners to deliver career guidance. This had often resulted in practitioners leaving Connexions due to compromises on ethics and the undue influence of inappropriate targets. In New Zealand, Douglas (2009a, 2010) examined a similar group of practitioners and how they construct themselves as professionals and their professional identities. Her study also concluded with concerns of narrow services objectives, ethical considerations and undermined professional judgments.

A key issue when considering career practitioners' professional identity in recent years has been the use of the word 'career' itself. The word was strongly discouraged in England (Bimrose, 2006) and no longer used in job titles; personal adviser replaced career adviser. Policy created a new profession, the 'personal adviser', but failed to acknowledge professional histories of practitioners who were transferred into this new role (Colley, 2009). With the loss of the word 'career' the term most frequently adopted was the generic 'Information, Advice and Guidance' (Lewin and Colley, 2011). Douglas (2004) raises concerns that career guidance will be lost because of 'bland meaningless descriptors'. Allied with this and in common with other elements of the sector, non-career specialists were providing advice and guidance on career issues (Colley et al., 2010). The refocusing of the political agenda from skills to social inclusion changed the dynamic of the career practitioners' role and how it was both delivered and perceived by users (Artaraz, 2006). This is supported by Souhami (2007) and Mellin, Hunt and Nicols (2011) who suggest that a primary difficulty for practitioners, particularly within helping roles, is the inability to differentiate between their role and that of others: what is it that they do, specifically, that others do not and how can this be articulated effectively? This distinction is what Freidson (1983) focuses on; he suggests occupational groups would be better to concentrate on what he refers to as 'special characteristics'. Occupational groups such as career guidance might therefore achieve greater public recognition if they were better able to promote what was distinctive about what they offer rather than pursuing an agenda of commonality with other professional groups.

For career guidance practitioners their role dramatically changed from one where they worked with young people to support their career choices to one where the parameters were somewhat hazy, requiring them to provide support on a broad range of issues including homelessness, dependency, pregnancy, health and relationships (Skills Commission, 2008). Souhami (2007) presents a similar situation for professionals working within the youth justice sector where they had to put aside their occupational identity when restructured from youth justice social workers to becoming interagency youth offending teams. She describes practitioners having a strong understanding of how they define their work and its purpose, common experiences and problems. Their inability however, to articulate their central tasks externally resulted in an inability to defend the parameters of their role from interagency working.

Mellin et al. (2011) present many of the same issues in counselling; a lack of general understanding of the role, difficulty in articulating professional identity, inability to differentiate the role of a counsellor from that of a psychologist or social worker. They also suggest that counsellors struggle to distinguish tasks, to articulate a professional identity and to describe overlapping and distinct activities within their own roles and those of inter-related professions. Mulvey (2011a) also acknowledges this phenomenon when describing the Careers Profession Task Force attempts to define the parameters of career guidance and the education workforce.

At one of the earliest meetings, possibly the very first navigation meeting, the chair asked us to delineate the boundaries of the career guidance and education workforce. This proved absurdly taxing, and demanded return and review before a consensus could be reached. The landscape is really very complex... (Mulvey 2011a:6)

This broadening out of the workforce and the lack of differentiation between specialist and generic roles has resulted in confusion for both users and allied professions, as traditionally practitioners in the role would have defined themselves as a career adviser. It is now likely they will have a plethora of job titles allocated to them (Neary and Jackson, 2010). The LLUK occupational map for career guidance identifies 43 job titles identified with the roles of the career guidance practitioner

within the adult guidance sector in the UK. Often individuals will carry a responsibility for career work in addition to their substantive role (Harrison et al.; 2001; Neary and Jackson, 2010). A general issue identified across all of these occupational groups is the overlapping nature of helping professions and how they have become less distinct as they have become more professionalised. This has resulted in a decreased and fragmenting professional identity. The last two decades have created a highly demoralised group of practitioners. Artaraz (2006), Colley (2009) and Douglas (2009a) present a bleak view of a practitioner group with a fading professional identity, if there ever was one, and a lack of clarity as to the future. Much of this is allied to an inability to articulate effectively what career guidance offers and the nature of the specialist professional skills that practitioners bring to the role.

2.14.3 Perceptions of self and others

Douglas (2009a) explores a belief held by many practitioners that guidance is generally perceived as something anyone can do. Studies exploring adult perceptions also indicate that individuals seek help and support from a wide range of sources which can include professional guidance practitioners but also friends, colleagues, mentors, tutors and employers (Taylor et al., 2005; Bimrose, Barnes and Hughes 2008). The Bimrose et al. (2008) study presents a five year longitudinal study which explores the experiences of a group of adults who have accessed a professionally delivered guidance session in a range of settings, both educational and community. Their findings indicate that the clients particularly valued the support as it provided space for reflection facilitated by an impartial professional.

For many practitioners lack of external credibility weakens perception of professional identity. Douglas (2009a) extends this lack of identity further in presenting practitioners as being unable to tell people what their job is or what they do. She describes practitioners as feeling more comfortable in talking about their organisation rather than about their role. For some practitioners this was linked to the terminology ascribed to their job; for others it was located in the challenge of defining multiple tasks within their role. The changing of names within the role was

often identified as an outcome of practice and policy shifts. Douglas (2009b) suggests that identity is constantly being renegotiated and as such there is a lack of a coherent professional identity. She supports Ibarra (1999) by suggesting that this lack of coherence is a result of a lack of ideal images on which individuals can model themselves. This implies that the relationship between self and others sharing a common job title, roles and tasks contributes to a sense of a shared commonality in the form of a community of practice and contributes to a distinct professional identity.

2.14.4 Community of practice

Wenger, McDermott and Snyder, (2002) define communities of practice as groups of people who share a common concern and deepen their knowledge and expertise through regular interaction. Although this offers a broad definition, groups tend to share a similar structure involving notions of domain, community and practice. Domain contributes to creating a sense of common identity, which affirms the purpose of the group. This supports and encourages individuals to contribute and participate in learning activities. The community acts within a reflective and reflexive mode in encouraging a willingness to get involved and to challenge ignorance to listen and learn. Practice is depicted by the specific knowledge the community share.

The extent to which career guidance practitioners consider themselves a community of practice is unclear from the literature. Harrison et al. (2001) claim there is no single community of practice: Bimrose (2004, 2006) concurs. Lave and Wenger (1991) define the community of practice as one which does not imply co-presence or an identifiable group but rather participation in activity systems which explore participants' understanding as to what they do and its meaning for their lives and communities.

A community of practice is an intrinsic condition of existence of knowledge, not least because it provides the interpretative support necessary for making sense of its heritage (Lave and Wenger, 1991:98)

An issue in relation to the broad range of individuals engaged in the career profession focuses on the use of language; what Lave and Wenger (1991:107)

describe as the difference between talking about practice and talking within practice. The linguistic practice therefore has an existence of its own; a criticism often raised is the intense jargonism that surrounds the guidance profession (Neary, 2004; Moore and Hooley, 2012). Lave and Wenger (1991:116) argue that a key element in the acceptance of the individual into the community of practice is the acceptance by and interaction with experienced practitioners, which represents their future. Colley et al. (2010) identify that for many practitioners part of their emotional labour is contributing and providing peer support. This is very much seen as a key element of their professional role. Additionally, participation in a community which is managed by and occupied by other career professionals is seen as essential for informal professional development. A sense of belonging and increasing sense of identity and learning are inseparable. Douglas (2009) suggests that within the career sector, practitioners lack these roles and cannot thus emulate them.

History and change are fundamental for all communities of practice that continue through development cycles as identities of participants evolve and consequently reproduce themselves as required. The transformation of knowledge, skills and discourse (Lave and Wenger, 1991) contributes to the development of identity and membership of the community of practice. They contend that both membership and identity are tied to motivation:

If the person is both member of a community and agent of activity, the concept of the person closely links meaning and action in the world (Lave and Wenger, 1991:122)

They suggest that 'knowing' contributes to the formation of identity specifically in knowing in the sense of specialist knowledge, practice, use of tools, and social organisation in relation to the community of practice. This last point has been the primary issue in relation to the career guidance community of practice where there has been a paradoxical increase in the importance of the role in relation to the fulfilment of government policy but a decrease in relation to the investment in skills and professionalisation of the workforce (Skills Commission, 2008; Colley, 2009). This could be argued as having impacted significantly on those new entrants to the profession and their perception of their professional identity.

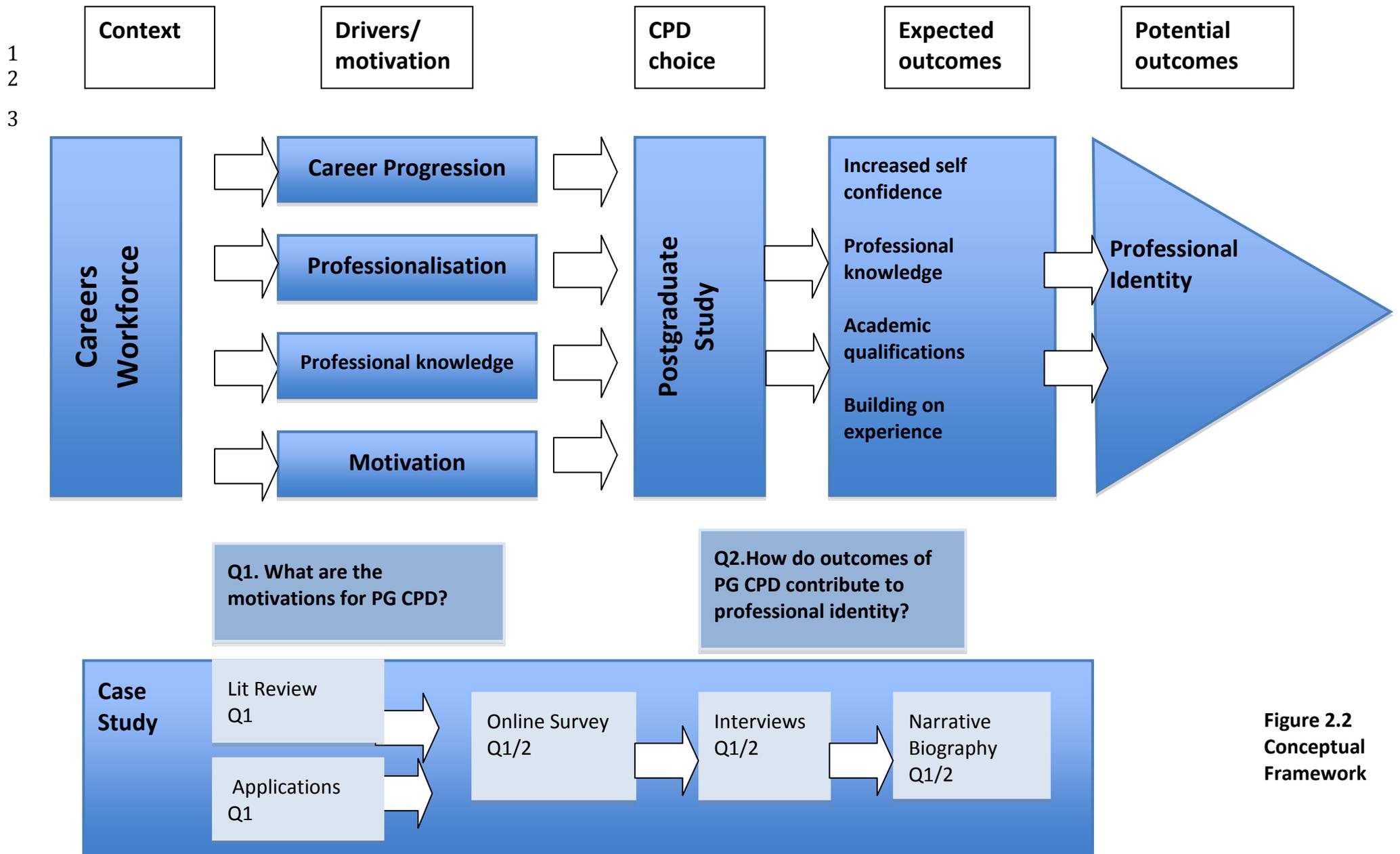
The role of learning within the context of both community of practice and professional identity is fundamental. The programme of study that this research project explores offers an example of how engagement in learning changes how the practitioner perceives themselves and creates their personal history within the context of their community. Wenger (1998) suggests that we belong to many communities of practice. Within the career sector these can be conceived at macro levels through professional associations and at micro levels through the work environment. The review of the literature presented above not only provides a synthesis of the key concepts and theories which are to be explored but also contributes to the shaping of the conceptual framework which will underpin this research project.

2.15 Developing the conceptual framework

The conceptual framework provided a central structure to draw together and encapsulate the concepts and study design to enable the production of interesting and useful results (Wisker, 2008). It guided the research through providing a clearly defined structure as to the concepts and methods to be adopted within the research. As Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (1996) suggest, it defines the territory. The construction of the conceptual framework provided a systemised approach to connect all aspects of the enquiry; this ensured that there was an explicit relationship between the research problem, the literature, the methodological approach and data analysis.

The initial literature review commenced with an extensive list of concepts informed by the pre-research feasibility study and the initial analysis of the applications and personal statements. These contributed to establishing the parameters within which the research project would be contained. After initial searches the concepts were refined further. Examples of those included were profession, professionalisation, professionalism, professional knowledge, competence, CPD, motivations for postgraduate study, professional identity and community of practice.

This phase is what Jabareen (2009) defines as identifying and naming the concepts. The purpose of this within the construction of the conceptual framework was to start to identify the relationships between the concepts and the extent to which they would contribute to answering the research question. From this stage the concepts were integrated and grouped to provide a coherent approach to working with the literature. This contributed to the construction of the theoretical framework which is examined in section 2.2. The construction of the theoretical framework provided the foundation for the conceptual framework.



**Figure 2.2
Conceptual
Framework**

The conceptual framework encapsulates both the process and parameters adopted in the planning, construction, and delivery of the research. These provide the vehicle through which the views of the participants were gathered to address the research question. From a reflexive perspective, implicit within this was the role of the researcher in choosing the methods, which were perceived as appropriate in accessing participant views and opinions. The conceptual framework therefore represents and reflects the researcher's perception of the research problem and the strategy adopted to address it.

Figure 2.2 offers a diagrammatic representation of the conceptual framework. The context in which the research is located is the careers workforce. For the purpose of this study the practitioners studying for a postgraduate programme represent the workforce. Their drivers and motivations for engaging in this form of CPD were drawn from the initial analysis of the student applications and personal statements and the theoretical framework. Thus providing both the theoretical perspective and the practitioner voice in defining their motivations, which were summarised within the conceptual framework as career progression, professionalisation, professional knowledge, and personal motivation.

These motivations then contribute to the choice of CPD which is postgraduate study. Allied with this choice or form of CPD is the expectations as to what outcomes will be achieved for the participant as a result of engaging successfully with a postgraduate programme. The expected outcomes component of the conceptual framework was informed by the literature review and the initial analysis of the programme applications and personal statement. Through these activities the expected outcomes were increased confidence in themselves and their job, extended professional knowledge, enhanced academic qualifications and the experience would support them in building on their existing practice. These outcomes would contribute to participant professional identity through contributing to the establishment, maintenance or enhancement of an existing professional identity.

Central to the conceptual framework is the case study that utilises multi-method as data gathering tools to explore the experience of the students. In conceptualising the research project, two questions were posed; 'What are the motivations for PG CPD' and 'How do the outcomes of PG CPD contribute to professional identity'. Participant views and experiences were gathered using the multi-method approach that consisted of the literature review, the document analysis of applications and personal statements, the online survey, telephone interviews and the narrative biography.

The application of these tools gathered data which assessed the participant's perceptions of themselves as individuals, their understanding of professional identity and how they articulate this, their motivation for postgraduate study, their perceptions of the benefits of study and the contribution of postgraduate CPD to professional identity. The data gathering tools were sequentially applied to explore the expected outcomes resulting from engagement in the programme and ultimately how professional identity of participants may be influenced as a result of engagement in postgraduate CPD. The analysis of the data drew from the conceptual framework and was aligned with the theoretical framework to identify and explore the findings generated through the data collection.

Throughout the research project the conceptual framework provided the intellectual guide to the study through which the relationships between the various concepts could be explored to address the research problem.

2.16 Conclusion

The literature reviewed above suggests that definitions within this field are both difficult and in some instances unhelpful as they potentially create artificial boundaries around fluid contexts. The concept of the professional has evolved from a traditional typology of characteristics prescribed by numerous authors to an agenda of marketisation and managerialism adopted to build customer confidence and control the workforce. The terminology is generically applied as a measure of

quality of service from the trades to highly salaried exclusive occupations. For many occupational areas the quest to seek professional recognition as identified by Mellin et al. (2011) and Murphy (2011) has resulted in a loss of autonomy and professional control.

This research explores a range of definitions to examine the views of career practitioners in an attempt to define what profession and professional identity means within the career sector. The literature addressing the career sector specifically evidences a long history of policy intervention or 'meddling' (Douglas, 2009a) resulting in a fragmented and poorly defined workforce which according to both the literature and policy documents is generally weakly professionalised. Additionally the workforce would appear to have an inability to clearly articulate who they are and what they do.

Careers practitioners have little to go on, the external environment has little knowledge or expectation of them (Douglas, 2009b:10)

This case study examines practitioners' perceptions of their own professional identity, and that of their colleagues, and tries to establish what contributes to the formation of professional identity and the role of postgraduate CPD within the process. The conceptual framework has resulted from the engagement in the literature and incorporates the theoretical framework which helps to guide the research.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction and overview

Throughout this section the nature of research is considered in order to explore its role and purpose in creating new knowledge to enhance the existing body of knowledge within the field and to support the development of practice. It examines the various discourses that underpin types of research and specifically the paradigms and theoretical perspective upon which this research project is based.

The research question for this study aimed to understand the rationale and decision making process that contributes to choices relating to CPD. Specifically it focused on why a group of career practitioners chose a postgraduate qualification to support their continuing professional development and how the outcomes of this choice influenced their professional identity. Additionally, it drew on a study conducted by Harrison et al. (2001) that examined the impact on practice for students undertaking a postgraduate module focusing on career work with the Open University. The rationale for this was to expand on Harrison et al. (2001) by exploring the influence of a programme on careers related practice. The data from the Harrison et al. (2001) project was made available to the researcher and therefore some of the themes including rationale for selecting the programme, impacts of study and impacts on practice were incorporated into this present study.

These themes were supplemented by those identified within the theoretical framework. This case study significantly extends the Harrison et al. (2001) project area of interest as it locates postgraduate study within the context of professional identity. The conceptual framework (Figure 2.2) guided and supported the direction of the investigation in that it contributed to shaping the research while also clarifying the relationships and interconnectivity of the component parts. It also informed the selection and construction of the various tools that supported the exploration.

This research was conducted for a number of reasons; (i) to conduct an exploration with participants in relation to their views and motivations for engaging in an academic postgraduate programme as continuing professional development, (ii) to explore the benefits of this type of study for practitioners, specifically in relation to professional identity and (iii) to contribute to the current debate concerning the professionalisation agenda for the career guidance sector of which CPD is a key element.

The originality of this research is located in the opportunity to explore career practitioners' views on and relationships with CPD. Allied with this and building on Harrison et al. (2001) was an exploration of the role of postgraduate CPD and the extent to which this influenced professional practice, professional identity and professionalisation. This was of specific importance in view of the emerging workforce requirements for higher-level qualifications and professional registration. As such this study will be of interest to a range of stakeholders who have responsibility for the professionalisation of the career workforce. This could include policy makers, employers, academics and practitioners interested in developing themselves.

This section of the thesis explores and presents the theoretical and methodological approach adopted for this study. This case study aimed to develop new knowledge through combining professional, technical, analytical and academic knowledge (Drake and Heath, 2011). The nature of the researcher's knowledge and values reflecting their views on the topic area is recognised as implicit within a study of this nature. Reid (2008) argues that we bring our own frame of reference and values to how we undertake research. As such this is acknowledged with the use of an interpretative perspective that recognises the dominance of the participants' voice while acknowledging the centrality of the researcher within this. The conceptual framework, therefore, reflects this and facilitates an insight into the range of expectations, aspirations and benefits to the participants' engagement with postgraduate level study.

3.2 Theoretical perspective

The apparent polarisation between the positivist and constructivist dimensions of reality can present the first major dilemma for the researcher. It represents a choice in defining the appropriate paradigm in which to locate the research to ensure a trustworthy approach is adopted. A fundamental issue in considering the paradigm approach focuses on whether social sciences should be considered in the same way as natural sciences, using the same methods and approaches, principally the use of observation and measurement. Smith (2000) posits that observations are interpreted through our preconceptions, biases, hypotheses and theories; that we choose what to focus on and what interpretation to put on them. He refers to Popper (1963) who suggests that there are always hypotheses implicit and explicit within observations and these are open to differing interpretation in the light of different theory. Smith (2000) argues that all knowledge is provisional; there is no absolute truth. Oliver (2010) suggests that all research is time-bound; therefore this research project can only provide a snap shot in time. Crotty (1998) in addition suggests that scientific knowledge is a particular form of constructed knowledge and serves a specific purpose, as measuring and counting often have an essential role to play in our understanding of social life.

All knowledge is said to be transient therefore, and as such all theory is incremental and presents a snap shot of perceived truths as they exist in time and history (Stevenson, 2000). That research is placed within time and history is pertinent to this project, which examines the changing nature of professional identity within the career guidance field, and the influences that contribute to this, many of which are time bound within UK government policy. Consequently this research, like all research, provides a snap shot in time; as such it is subject to the fluid and evolving landscape within the field. The inception and reporting of the Careers Profession Task Force (2010) in particular, has provided an impetus which may have a significant influence on the future professional identity of careers practitioners.

Much discussion within the research literature is dedicated to the paradigm debate and the need for researchers to have a clear alignment with either (quantitative)

positivism or (qualitative) constructivist approaches. Creswell (1994) suggests that paradigms encompass theories and methods. The positivist approach seeks to use the logic of experiment where variables can be manipulated to identify relationships through neutral observation and contribute to defining universal laws (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). The utilisation of a deductive approach aims to test probability of significance and prove or disprove a hypothesis. Therefore, this approach is not applicable within this study as a hypothesis is not being tested and participants are not being treated as subjects in a controlled experiment.

Researchers are required to justify their selected research methods in relation to ontology, epistemology and paradigm. The challenge for the researcher often focuses on the definitions and interpretations, some of which can be intangible (Bryman, 2004). Much of this challenge concerns conflicting and contradictory definitions contained within the literature (Crotty, 1998; Bryman, 2004). Both provide definitions as to ontology and epistemology but the definitions vary. The ontology adopted within this study draws from Blaikie (1993) who considers the assumptions the approach to social enquiry makes about the nature of social reality (Blaikie, 1993). As such this case study examines the nature of the lived social reality of the students on a particular course over a defined time period. The case study will examine the what, why and how questions to understand this.

Schwandt (2000) presents the interpretative position as an attempt at understanding and interpreting the meaning behind social action. Matthews and Ross (2010) consider the interpretative approach as one where rich and descriptive data is collected uncovering subjective contextual meaning and empathetic understandings. Creswell (1994) and Oliver (2010) define the constructivist/naturalistic/interpretative paradigm as one in which reality is constructed by those individuals who are involved in the research and that all individuals will apply meaning from their own perspective. This statement presents the researcher's assumptions about reality and therefore the theoretical perspective (Crotty, 1998). His definition of adopting an interpretative approach focuses on the culturally derived and historically situated

interpretations of the social life-world that reflects the approach adopted within this study. This research project utilises an interpretivist stance considering 'understanding' and 'interpretation' within human inquiry specifically within an historical location to explore the formation of professional identity of career guidance practitioners, concerned as it is with the perceptions and attitudes of individual students engaged in the postgraduate level programme.

If one accepts epistemology as the study of what counts as what we believe to be true and therefore, considered valid knowledge (Oliver, 2010), then the theoretical perspective adopted within the research study defines what is acceptable as knowledge. From the positivist perspective objects which cannot be observed, measured and quantified will not be considered knowledge. Conversely only knowledge which presents meaning can be considered from a purely constructivist perspective. Blaikie (1993) considers that epistemology within an interpretative paradigm draws from the everyday social world to 'grasp socially constructed meaning' (Blaikie, 1993:96). The research is aiming to collect rich data through a case study that examines the reality as the social actors participating in this study construct it.

The argument presented in this project is that the nature of the enquiry, epistemology and chosen literature lead towards the application of qualitative methodologies for the project. This should, for example,

Help acquire insights not by establishing causality, but through improving our comprehension of the whole (Webb, 2002:29)

Qualitative methodologies, it can be argued, allow the exploration of phenomena within the social world constructed by people, whereby the ongoing interpretation is continually evolving (Baikie, 1993).

When considering an interpretative approach, case study (see section 3.5) provides a suitable methodology as it supports a range of data collection techniques that can apply at different stages of the project. Data collection techniques considered for this research project included; survey, semi-structured interviews, document

analysis and narrative biographies to provide a robust approach to gathering data on individuals' views and to ensure triangulation. Application of heterogeneous data gathering tools within a qualitative research project provides an opportunity to assess the efficacy of the data through a range of prisms.

3.3 Participant voice

Research can be used to locate debate concerning philosophical and professional discourse and be used as a vehicle to present arguments which draw together practitioners, policy makers and academics (Edwards, Harrison and Tait 1998; Reid, 2007). This research was driven by a motivation to provide colleagues in the career sector with a voice. This would facilitate them to share what life is like for them within their environment and the extent to which they enjoyed or not a professional or occupational identity and how this supports them in their work. McLeod, (2011) argues that even though 'voice' has popular currency, it is not clear what is meant by voice. She suggests that voice is not simply speech but can mean 'identity, or agency, or even power and perhaps capacity or aspiration' (McLeod, 2011:181). The concepts described by McLeod (2011) are not independent and are frequently inter-related. Within this study one or all of these concepts may depict voice for participants.

As practitioner/researcher I had the opportunity to offer a voice and to act as a conduit, through dissemination of the research, for colleagues who are not in this position or do not feel empowered to do this for themselves. Gitlin (2008) describes how educational research in particular has recognised that many excluded groups have a story to tell. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) describe giving voice as empowering people to have a voice who may otherwise remain silent without support. This research aims to provide a vehicle for the participants in this study to tell their stories.

McLeod (2011) argues that there are tensions in giving voice. She describes issues within feminist activity wherein women's voice created gender binaries but at the expense of acknowledgement of social differences such as class, ethnicity, race etc. It

is therefore misleading to suggest that a researcher can present a collective voice within research without accepting that there may be contextual differences to that voice. Therefore there may be different voices which need to be represented. Midgley, Davies, Oliver and Danaher (2014) argue that there are many issues in representing voice; particularly can participant voices be represented as complete? They suggest that research design can inhibit participant voice and that empowerment may be achieved through consideration of research activities. This case study has utilised a multi-method approach over a three year period, that has attempted to provide participants with multiple opportunities to engage in the research and at different times in their academic study. Although research may provide an individual with a voice there are, however, no guarantees that that voice will be heard. McLeod (2011) presents that the responsibility shifts from the speaker to the listener and the ability to make oneself heard. This also, therefore, reflects on the researcher to support 'voice' through disseminating their research as widely as possible. The dissemination of the research is explored in chapter 7.

Ontologically Creswell's (1994:5) contention that 'reality is subjective and multiple as seen by participants in the study' is the one which best describes this study. The researcher interacted with those being researched both formally and informally through the range of tools adopted. James and Busher (2006) in their study recognise that the development of trust was less of an issue due to pre-existing professional relationships. The existing relationship and the role of the insider researcher therefore, influence the relationship between the researcher and the researched.

The experience of the researcher being part of the researched world can also potentially have an influence from the selection of the topic, the level of knowledge of the topic area and on the power relationships between the researcher and the researched. Practitioner/researchers interpret what they see using existing knowledge and beliefs as a filter (Radnor, 2002). As such, in many ways our views are implicit within our research. Pring (2000) suggests that the 'creations' established by the research are influenced by the values the researcher brings to the research;

these creations are then negotiated with the participants to reach consensus. This duality of the inter-relationship between the researcher and the researched is important as it presents an ongoing transfer of power between the parties ending with consensus. Pure participant voice may be an aspiration rather than a reality. However the researcher aimed to provide respondents with an opportunity to share their views, which may in turn empower them to develop a stronger voice in the longer term. This may occur by participants hearing their own voice through the interview transcripts and through the dissemination activities. This may encourage them to own their voice and find ways to make it heard.

3.4 Locating the researcher in the research

The interpretative paradigm supports the values of the researcher being embedded within the research. It also reflects what Creswell (1994) refers to as the personal voice, the evolving decision, an inductive process and a merging design. Reflexivity is arguably essential within all interpretative studies, within this study in particular the acknowledgement of multiple roles is important. It could be suggested that students may be concerned about the 'messages' they are presenting about themselves to their tutor outside of the tutor/student relationship and potential impacts this may have. To mitigate this a number of ex-students were also interviewed. The use of triangulation and multiple data gathering techniques provided an attempt to ensure the data could be viewed from multiple perspectives. The researcher has to explicitly locate themselves and their ideas within the research project, leading to a reflexive approach (Drake and Heath, 2011). Consequently the knowledge and contribution of the researcher is circumscribed yet also considered a strength within the project, this adds depth to the findings and insights generated.

The multiple roles that the researcher/practitioner can have within one organisation can lead to both personal and professional challenges. Transparency was therefore of great importance in explicitly differentiating the roles for the research participants. This was both from an ethical and practical perspective to ensure participants had clarity as to the specific role with which they were engaging. Drake and Heath (2011) present the practitioner/researcher as phronesis, combining

professional and technical knowledge with academic and analytical knowledge. This relationship through the nature of the range of roles and knowledge integrated within the research project presents a unique perspective on the research. As such multiple integrities are required to differentiate for the self the various roles being adopted (Drake and Heath, 2011). Costley and Gibbs (2006) explore this further in considering the multiple perspectives that the practitioner/researcher needs to be mindful of, including their perspective, the context they are researching and the academic requirements of research. All these required a cognisance of care in which the various roles were effectively managed. The potential ethical tension which could have been created therefore needed to attract careful consideration throughout the research process and the dissemination activities. Reflexivity is constant throughout the research to ensure the research is mindful of the impact on what those who are being investigated will present, as it may influence their own views and how they respond or feel they are expected to respond. This applied within this research where elucidation of participants' views is subject to their and the researcher's interpretation.

3.5 Selecting case study as the approach

A case study design was considered to meet the needs of the research question as the focus of the study was located within one institution and involved a student body that had enrolled for the same academic programme. All participants worked within the same sector and were studying over a defined time scale. The focus was to explore the context in depth and from a number of perspectives which would uncover the 'worldview' of those within the case study.

The rationale in selecting a case study approach for this project was driven by the opportunity to consider a phenomenon with little literature to support it. For example there is little published addressing engagement in postgraduate CPD within the careers sector. Much of the debate concerning case study focuses on what constitutes the case, (Stake, 2000; Burton, 2000b; Denscombe, 2007). Case study definitions include:

...an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence (Robson, 1993:146)

‘It is a focus and the focus is on one thing, looked at in depth and from many angles’ (Thomas, 2011:9)

Hamel, Dufour and Fortin (1993) consider a case study as an in-depth study of the cases which are being considered, and the depth represents the key feature of the approach. They also consider that an important component is the distinctive view brought to the research by the researcher, which is relevant within this case study as my role as a career professional is germane to this.

This case study provided an opportunity to investigate a social unit and to understand the personal experiences of the social actors within the study using a powerful descriptive tool.

The degree of detail in the description of the case study thus serves to ensure that the representativeness of the case under investigation has been defined in a manner that is clearly apparent (Hamel et al., 1993:35).

Hamel et al. (1993) suggest that the value of case study as a method is based on the quality used in defining the subject and the rigour employed in describing the subject in the form of the analysis.

Stake (2000), like Yin (1993) and Bassegy (1999), presents distinctions of typology when considering case study. He identifies three types; intrinsic, instrumental and collective. He differentiates these whereby ‘intrinsic’ represents an in-depth understanding of the case as the priority within the research. ‘Instrumental’ defines the case study as a vehicle for examining an issue, while the ‘collective’ presents comparator case studies, where multiple cases may be considered. These contrast with the typologies of Yin (1993) who adopts a positivist paradigm in comparison to Stake (2000). Bassegy (1999) in contrast presents a set of criteria to define an educational case study. Using a Stenhouse (1988) definition the question could

qualify as an evaluative case study as it studied in depth and could potentially provide information to inform decision makers to make judgments concerning the merit and worth of a programme. In this case the decision makers would be potential students, their employers, funders and policy makers. These various definitions, although helpful in providing an initial structure to locate the study, can also over-complicate the situation, as the definitions presented could be considered arbitrary.

Thomas (2011) presents explanatory case studies whereby the studies provide an in-depth understanding of an issue and the examination of a problem where more information is required. Thomas (2011) suggests that clarity about the purpose of the study is essential when deciding how the case study is to be structured. This case study is located as an explanatory case study as it is focused on an in-depth interpretative understanding of a phenomenon and aims to offer explanations of the multi-faceted interrelationships across the study. This will be achieved through developing an understanding of the choices that career practitioners make in relation to their CPD and to consider if these influence how they see themselves within a professional context. This exploration is contained within the context of the masters programme. A case study approach is the most appropriate for this research as it facilitates a focused investigation within a clearly defined and unique setting, both in terms of the masters programme and the individual contexts of the students within the programme.

3.5.1 Strengths and weaknesses of the case study

The benefits of adopting a case study approach focused on the boundaries that surrounded the definition of the case. In this instance the study was defined multi-dimensionally as; the students, the course, a defined academic area within the university, a defined timeframe and within the context of all participants working in a similar role. By defining the parameters clearly it allowed the researcher to be precise as to what would and would not be included. The depth rather than breadth offered a distinct advantage to what Denscombe describes as the 'subtleties and intricacies of complex social situations' (2007:45).

Many authors including Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2001) promote case study as a particularly viable option for small-scale studies due to the focused resource required. They present a number of additional benefits, noticeably understanding complex relationships and the facilitation of conceptual and theoretical developments. They claim the richness of the data can contribute to the generation of new thinking and new ideas.

Thomas (2011) regards the singleness and being 'allowed' to use a range of methods and procedures as a determining strength for this method. He argues that this provides a richness which is examined through different kinds of information from different angles. The strength of the case study within this particular research is that the case is clearly defined and accessible to the researcher. It provides the opportunity for the researcher to investigate complex interrelationships between the students and their profession using the programme as a vehicle. It supports the investigation of the lived reality (Hodkinson and Hodkinson 2001) through exploring the experiences of the individuals. They refer to this as retaining the 'noise' of real life. This is highly pertinent as this study is aiming to understand what that 'noise' might look like for the participants within the study.

There are of course a number of limitations with this approach. These are considered by Flyvbjerg (2004). He suggests they can be categorised into (i) the nature of the data being both complex and extensive, (ii) the expense of large studies, (iii) generalisation of findings and (iv) the inability of case studies to address a large number of research questions. These provided a useful set of questions and issues to address prior to embarking on the study. Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2001) also identified extensive data as an issue and that researchers can be swamped by what they collect.

This need for selective focusing was guided by the conceptual framework and ensured that the best use was made of resources and the case study was constructed to maximise the selection of data to be collected and analysed. This

study was undertaken within the context of the researcher's own professional role and as such size was defined carefully by the researcher. The inability to generalise from findings is often presented as a major weakness; however there is no pretence offered that the findings are representative. Thomas (2011) argues that there is limited generalisation offered by the human sciences and that it is exemplary knowledge from case study that offers it legitimacy.

Many of the limitations of the case study approach were considered by the researcher prior to selection. These were evaluated to assess and determine if the benefits of the method outweighed the identified deficits. Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2001) assert that although there are many criticisms concerning case study research as a method, it is supported by a movement within education circles to embrace a more evidence-based approach to research. They argue that much of the best small scale study research has been produced using case study approaches. In addition for many practitioners working in the learning and skills sector, case study is one of the few viable options which may be available due to limited resources and time available to conduct research. These arguments contributed to the adoption of the approach as appropriate in contributing to a limited evidence base.

3.5.2 Defining the case study

The use of case study was attractive as the question examined one course at one university in England and the students who had enrolled for the course, thus providing a social unit. The course was a postgraduate level programme marketed as 'continuing professional development for practitioners within the career guidance sector'. It was delivered through e-learning and as such it attracted a wide range of applicants both from the UK and overseas. The selection criteria for the programme were very precise and places were only offered to applicants who had experience of working within a role providing support to individuals in making educational, career and learning choices. The researcher was the programme leader for the course.

The group of students represented a microcosm of the sector as all career guidance specialisms, levels of training and employer type were represented within it. This

established a fixed environment through which tentative findings could be applied to other course centres offering similar programmes within the field. This is especially pertinent, as CPD is increasingly developing a higher profile in relation to policy, funding opportunities and the professional associations. The results and findings from this one case therefore could offer some interesting insights into practitioner views as well as documenting the practitioner voice. As Thomas (2011) suggests 'singleness' is of importance in exploring the 'how' and 'why' at an in-depth level.

The use of multi-method data gathering techniques particularly appealed as this offered a multi-dimensional approach to investigating the specific question. The use of this multiple tool approach is identified by Thomas (2011) as one of strengths of case study, 'it only become intelligible by looking at it from different directions and using different methods' (Thomas 2011:68). What was crucial was the consideration of the entirety of the case, in that the inter-relationship between all the factors such as the students, their work context and their motivations for study all contributed to attaining a better understanding of their perception of their professional world. Hamel et al. (1993) argue that the case study adopts different methods in order to collect various kinds of information and data; the variety contributes to the wealth and depth of the data collected. This study was focused on exploring professional identities and the meaning that practitioners ascribed to those identities. The case study explored the role of postgraduate level study in influencing the development of practitioner professional identity. The study was empirical, localised to one institution and was time bound. It was a single case study as it was the course within the institution and the students on programme that defined it as a case, rather than a series of participant case studies.

3.5.3 Constructing the case study

The case study participants were composed of two groups, applicants to the course and students on the programme. All those who were included in the study had therefore applied to and/or enrolled on the e-learning programme. The nature of e-learning as a form of study was not considered as a factor within the study, although

it was recognised as a potential influence on selection of the programme in the first instance. It was excluded primarily as the study focus was on the choice of postgraduate level study as a form of continuing professional development, and not on the medium of delivery.

The case study data was composed of a number of components, which included a five-part multi-method research design. This was constructed in a specific order (Burton, 2000a) to enable each part to build on the data findings from the previous part. This offered an organic and evolving approach that was challenging and generative but also required careful management

Within the construction of the case study two components were developed that offered descriptive statistical data which were used to inform the direction of study. Analysis of the student applications and statements and the survey both offered limited amount of numerical data that was utilised to provide descriptive statistics. This numerical data was not used within a mixed method approach as the data collected examined perceptions of study participants; therefore the purpose was not quantification but illumination. The use of mixed methods research utilises a combination of quantitative and qualitative data in a study, the premise being that this combination provides a better understanding of the research problem (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007). Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) discuss examples of studies that would not be considered as mixed methods; these included multi-method. This study uses multi-method located within a case study. Additionally they suggest that studies which collect qualitative data but analyse it quantitatively in counting words and responses would not be traditionally perceived as a mixed methods approach. These data sets were purposefully included at the early stages of the research to explore a wider range of participant views. As such they contributed to the formulation of the topic areas to be explored using the text data sets.

3.5.4 The research phases

A multi-method approach was constructed to form the case study (see Figure 3.1). This section describes each of the phases and how they interrelated to offer a cohesive data gathering approach.

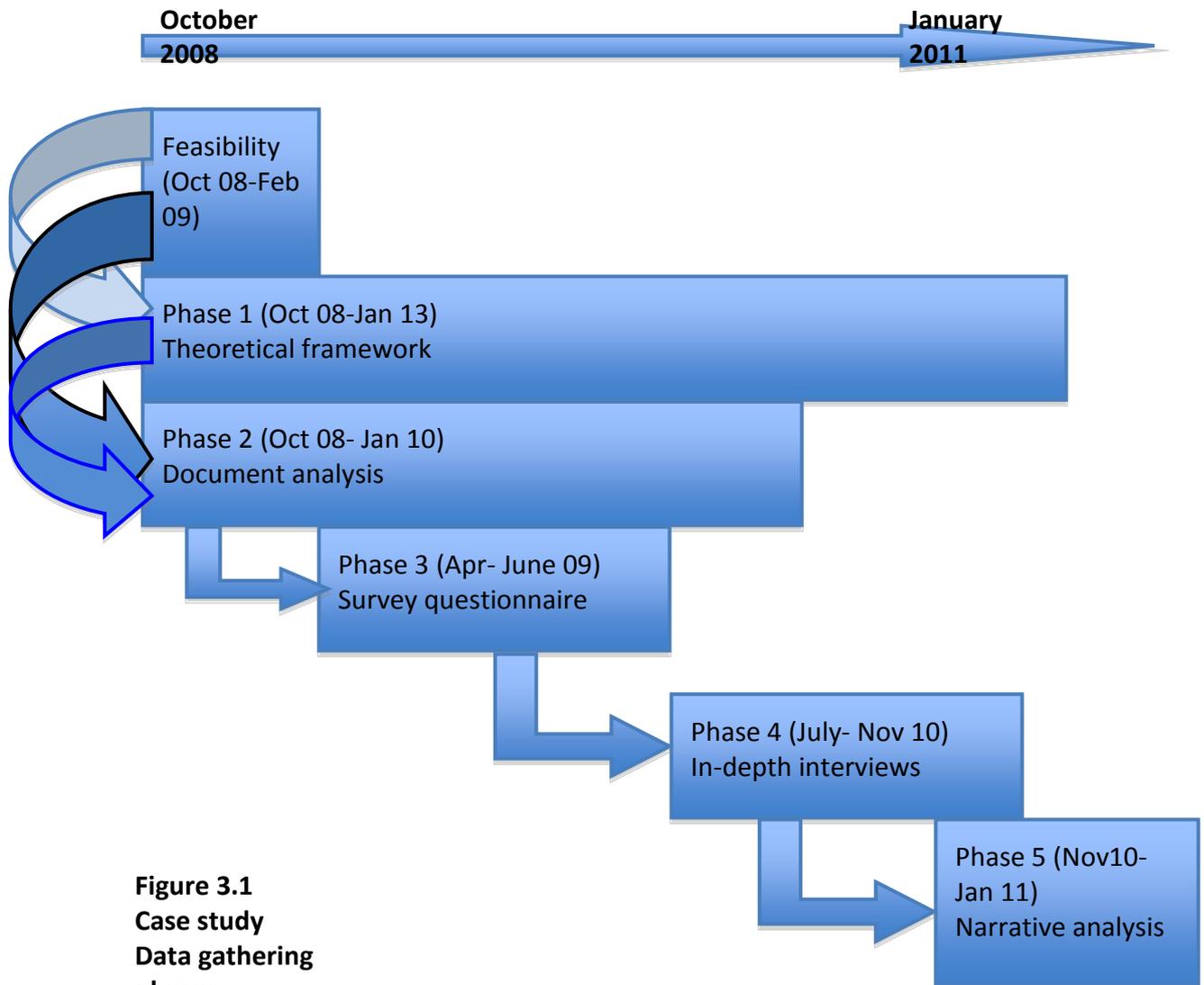


Figure 3.1
Case study
Data gathering
phases

Prior to the commencement of the research project a feasibility study was undertaken to assess the applicability of the research question and to help refine the focus of the study. The rationale for this was to explore with career practitioners, who were members of professional associations, their views of higher-level qualifications such as postgraduate diplomas and masters and how these could

contribute to professional practice. The feasibility was conducted through the delivery of semi-structured questionnaires and workshops at regional ICG and NAEGA events. This activity identified that practitioners were interested in developing their practice through higher level qualifications and that they could benefit their practice. This data was used in a formative sense in assessing the feasibility and parameters of the research project, reflecting Thomas' (2011) purpose and questions stage.

The substantive components of the research can be divided into 5 interrelated phases; (i) theoretical framework, (ii) document analysis, (iii) survey questionnaire, (iv) in-depth interviews and (v) narrative biographies.

Although the term 'phase' is used here to describe the process that was applied to the research, this does not fully reflect the interrelationship between the aspects of the data gathering and the analysis. The feasibility study which was conducted prior to the commencement of the research was incorporated to demonstrate its position within the phases of the research. This diagram represents the interrelationship between all the stages of the research and how each stage informs the next. This ensured that an iterative approach was adopted whereby the findings at each stage were tested out in the subsequent stages, providing triangulation (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

- Phase 1 the construction of the theoretical framework, contributed throughout the research project. As such it is interrelated with all the other elements of the study and contributed to shaping the thematic areas to be explored within the subsequent data gathering methods.
- Phase 2 focused on document analysis, examining the applications and personal statements submitted by prospective students submitted when applying for the postgraduate programme. This phase ran concurrently with both phase 1 (theoretical framework) and phase 3 (survey questionnaire). This phase contributed to the identification of common and recurring themes. Phase 2 was conducted concurrently with phase 3.

- Phase 3 consisted of the survey questionnaire which was administrated online. All UK based students who had enrolled on the programme from 2005 to 2009 were invited to contribute. This included students who were currently on programme, had completed with a full or interim award, or had left part way through their studies. The analysis of the data gathered from this phase contributed to the construction of the topic areas to be addressed in phase 4.
- Phase 4 examined the themes identified through the earlier phases of the research with a sample of the survey participants. This provided an opportunity to examine participant views directly through semi-structured telephone interviews. The key themes identified during data analysis were synthesised, and formed the focus for the narrative biographies.
- Phase 5 adopted narrative biographies with a sample of students who had previously been included in phase 2 (document analysis) only. The narrative biographies provided new participants with an opportunity to contribute and to test out the findings from the previous data sets and assess their resonance.

All these elements were considered in the construction of the conceptual framework and the approach adopted for data gathering. The construction of the research ensured that the case study intricately explored the case from multiple angles and each data set contributed to this 'drilling down' (Thomas, 2011:4).

This 'drilling down' (Thomas, 2011) allowed participant views to be tested out in more than one data collection phase and procedure. Each phase explored in more depth the findings from the previous phase, providing a progression towards a more in-depth analysis of a purposive sample of individuals and their journey, over a period of years. This provided the depth and opportunity to explore more fully the meaning of the individuals' lived experiences.

A strength of the case study is the range of data collection methods which could be used (Thomas, 2011). The use of multiple tools reduced reliance on a single method and supported triangulation of data. The approach adopted also benefited in terms of the data collection model, which was overlapping both in terms of the timeline and the participants.

Savage (2006) presents a picture of data collection being responsive to the field and not being constrained by a prescriptive pre-determined design. In relation to this study, data collection design and the concepts explored were confined within the conceptual framework and bounded by the parameters of the case study. Rock (2001) suggests that it is virtually impossible to anticipate what will emerge from research and as such the important questions often arise in situ. Within this study the context of the students themselves, the policy initiatives 'from above' and the impacts these have had on the career professional, all influenced the nature of this study. These factors do not remain static and scope needed to be built in to address fundamental changes if and when they arose within the life of the research study.

3.5.5 Sample

Probability sampling can be used within quantitative studies to produce a small scale model of the population it is researching (Richie, Lewis and Elam (2003). Within qualitative studies this approach is less applicable as according to Silverman (2011) the sample size would be too extensive to undertake any meaningful analysis. As such, qualitative research adopts non-probability samples, which allow samples that reflect the features that are to be explored. This approach to sampling was therefore not expected to be statistically representative of the population.

Thomas (2011) suggests that there is no point thinking about traditional sampling techniques in case study research, as the case study is the sample. However, the case study within this research is an academic programme attracting students from across the UK and wider afield. The researcher was only interested in UK students for reasons previously discussed, namely the commonality of training and qualifications, work contexts, professional association membership, language and exposure to and

impact of policy agendas. Therefore a purposive sampling approach was adopted at the commencement of the study to exclude all non-UK based students.

Purposive sampling ensures that relevant criteria are included and that critical thinking has ensured that the boundaries of what are to be explored are appropriate. This sits well within the case study construct as it provides a duality of approach ensuring parameters are clear around both the study and the participants within it. Although this research was identifying and selecting the potential study participants, this was undertaken purposefully (Ritchie et al., 2003).

The sample contained practitioners reflecting different age groups, gender, initial training, employers, professional bodies, longevity within the role and position within their employing organisation. This supported the view that theory developed could be applicable to the practitioner groupings within the case study and thus help to identify possible influences impacting on the professional identity of practitioners.

This section presents a brief overview of the numbers of potential contributors for each data set and the numbers of respondents. Table 3.1 presents a summary of the numbers of potential contributors for each data set and the number of respondents.

Method	Number of potential contributors	Number of respondents
Document analysis - Applications/personal statements	73	58
Survey questionnaire	53	18
In-depth interviews	16	7
Narrative biography	42	5

Table 3.1 Summary of number of participants for each method

When considering the application and personal statements 73 applications were available for analysis. After consent was sought and an initial sift 15 were excluded. The rationale for rejection included information provided being illegible, too brief or lacking any detail to support the application or consent was not given. Applications

from 58 potential applicants were included in the final analysis. As with most programmes, not all those who applied for the programme were offered a place or chose to accept an offer. Therefore the number of applications does not correspond with the number on programme. Some students had started prior to the current application process; consequently their applications were not available.

The survey questionnaire was distributed to 53 students who were currently on programme or had completed within the previous twelve months. From this group 18 responses were returned providing a 34% response rate. At the end of the questionnaire participants were invited to indicate if they would be willing to contribute to the next stage of the study. Only those who gave consent were considered for the interview stage. The sample was identified after linking applications and personal statements with completed questionnaires. This allowed the participant to be tracked throughout the process, specifically a year after they had completed the questionnaire and to see if changes had occurred in relation to their views on the topic areas and what had influenced this.

To select participants for interview the list of names on the applications was compared with those who responded to the survey; there were 16 names in common. An additional level of selection was then applied based on the participants' occupational area. This was included to ensure that the sample was not skewed to one occupational group which could then overly influence the data. From this group 8 were invited to take part; 7 accepted. These participants were perceived to provide sufficient coverage of the occupational settings.

When selecting the sample to be included in the narrative biography, the current student body was again considered excepting those who had already contributed to the survey interview; this totalled 42. The rationale for this was to ensure that themes identified in the interviews could be tested out with a new group of study participants. Responses were received from 5 students. A full exploration of each method selected and the process applied to data collection can be found in sections 3.7-3.10 inclusive.

3.5.6 Generalisation

Generalisation allows findings from a study of a sample to have broader relevance outside of the sample and the specific research context (Lewis and Ritchie, 2003). However, generalisation in qualitative research is much debated (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Lewis and Ritchie 2003) and most often in relation to case study research (Bassey, 1999; Flyvbjerg 2004; Thomas 2011). Thomas (2011) suggests that case study is considered the poor relation within the social sciences because of its deficiencies. He argues that other social science methodologies attempt to 'calibrate to enable generalisation' through specific definitions of generalisation. Denscombe (2007) suggests that although each case is unique it is also an example of a broader grouping. Stake (2000) also explores this in considering the role of comparisons and singularity and argues that the extent to which one case may be quite different to another does not make the research invalid. Pring (2000) presents this issue as a strength in that the descriptions of the case may alert others in similar situations. Bassey (1999) suggests that unqualified generalisations can be made from small-scale case studies; however he also sees the potential value in what he refers to as 'fuzzy generalisations'. Bassey (1999) argues that fuzzy generalisation, however, can support claims that are singular or typical and can be perceived as 'possible', 'likely' or 'unlikely' and may be found in similar situations elsewhere. The words of caution from Bassey (1999), Stake (1995), Reid (2007) concern the making of too sweeping generalisations based on limited case study data. Thomas (2011) prefers to consider generalisations as 'abductions'. These he defines as making a

'Judgement concerning the best explanation for facts you are collecting. It is what we do in case studies' (Thomas, 2011:212)

These views were all helpful in keeping a perspective on what may be unique within this case study and what may have resonance for other programmes of this nature. This stance recognises that generalisability is unlikely to be an outcome but values what might be singular rather than general.

3.6 Ethical issues

Within the context of this study ethics are viewed within two domains, those relating to good research practice and those that are specifically relevant to the insider researcher. This section explores how ethical perspectives contributed to the research construction and the reflexivity of the researcher.

3.6.1 General ethical considerations

Ethical issues are outlined by Celnick (2000) who provides a useful foundation for consideration. Factors such as confidentiality, disclosure and treatment of sensitive data (including anonymity) are critical to the success of the research. Drake and Heath (2011) refer to these as the conventions of research and include the right to withdraw as a key requirement. The study has kept British Educational Research Association (BERA) guidelines (2004, updated in 2011) at the forefront throughout the development process. As within the agreed protocols all participants were anonymised to protect the identity of those individuals and organisations that contributed to the project.

An important element of the study focused on reciprocity and the intention that participants gain in some way from having contributed. This could take a number of forms including validation in relation to their experiences, a voice and an opportunity to air their views and be listened to. Study participants who contributed to the in-depth interviews stage were provided with copies of the transcripts of the interviews both to check and confirm their contribution but also as a record of their involvement. Many informally commented on how useful they found the activity as it provided a record of their career development, but also catalogued their achievements.

All participants within the research were giving something of themselves, whether time, thoughts, ideas or views. Respect for this was paramount in recognising their contribution; without participants there is no research. Within this project as with all projects, ethics are paramount and were considered at all stages of the project. An essential consideration was obtaining informed consent from all involved (Appendix

2 and 4). In the application analysis phase for example all applicants for the programme from September 2005 were emailed and their permission was sought to review their applications and to include them as part of the case study data. The applicants were those who had formally made applications for the programmes either through the on-line application process combined with a personal statement.

All applicants were given the option to be excluded, and two applicants indicated this as their choice. For those who contributed to the study, all were provided with a letter of introduction including details of how to contact the researcher to discuss the project if interested. All participants were given the option to withdraw from the project; dates for this were provided. All confirmed their willingness to contribute through ticking a consent box and submitting the form to the researcher. At all stages of the study participants were assured of their anonymity and confidentiality in contributing to the project and that statements would not be attributed to individuals.

Throughout the study the university has not been anonymised as the programme was well known in that there are few e-learning programme of this type in the UK. Therefore anonymity of the programme could not be guaranteed.

The ethical considerations for this project were discussed with colleagues, with supervisors and reviewed against the university ethics policy. Other ethical issues considered included:

- clarifying and gaining agreement with the participants on the purpose and parameters of the study;
- adopting a non-judgemental approach by listening to and respecting individuals' views;
- establishing 'trust and openness' in the role of researcher;
- being cognisant of the dynamics of power relations;
- consent for dissemination

It is the ethical responsibility of the researcher to ensure their findings are shared and contribute to knowledge and practice. It is also an ethical responsibility to make the best possible use of the findings to develop and inform practice as well as respecting the contribution made by the participants. As part of the initial informed consent, issues in relation to the publication and dissemination of the findings were addressed and agreed with the participants. Other issues considered within the ethical framework were to ensure that the dissemination provided a voice for the practitioner and did not just 'glorify' the writer (Moje, 2000).

3.6.2 Insider researcher

In this type of study when a researcher is researching their colleagues/students within a professional capacity the ethics of their 'insider/outsider' role needs to be considered and recognised (Robson, 1993). As such the ethical issues can be complex. Not least of which is the multiple roles attributed to both the researcher and the research participants who in this study took the form of teacher, student, colleague, friend or in some instances customers of the researcher's employing organisation. In addressing this it was important to acknowledge the existence of multiple roles and to define these explicitly within all interactions. The research also needed to acknowledge that the context within which the research was being conducted changed i.e. wide scale redundancy and changes in government policy (Hooley and Watts, 2011), and participant vulnerabilities became more evident throughout the study. As such researcher reflexivity supported and guided the relationships between the researcher and the study participants. This was achieved through sensitivity and empathy with the participants' situation, being part of the sector was a benefit here as the researcher was able to relate to the issues that were being experienced and presented.

In terms of the boundaries around the roles within the research, that is, researcher and participant, ethical issues also arose as the study evolved and many participants were subject to redundancy. This created a number of ethical issues as, within the interviews, many wanted to discuss their career and what choices they might have. As a practitioner this presented tensions in wanting to 'help' but simultaneously

needing to maintain the researcher role. To address this the researcher offered participants who were in this position an opportunity to discuss their situation outside of the research activity.

Drake and Heath (2011) suggest that ethical concerns for the insider researcher can focus on being a member of an organisation that has a culture and its own code of ethics. They also highlight loyalty to the profession and how this may be challenged through what the research might expose. As a careers practitioner I subscribe to the NAEGA code of principles which require me to 'demonstrate professional integrity and high standards of ethical practice' NAEGA (2007). As such publication of research findings which may challenge the professionalism of careers practitioners could present ethical issues which impact on myself as a professional, my relationship with my research participants and my professional community. Allied with this is my membership of the university that also requires my conformance to an ethical framework and for me to publish. Of greater importance within the context of this study the publication and dissemination of the research contributes to 'giving voice' to the participants.

The power relationship between tutor and student is also one that needed addressing within the ethical framework. From a Foucauldian perspective power can be found in all social interactions (Lynch, 2011), although that is not to suggest that it is always the most dominant factor influencing relationships. Regardless, the relationship between the insider researcher/tutor and the study participant/student warrants consideration. Lynch (2011), discussing Foucault's view of power, suggests that self-presentation is shaped by power relations; therefore force relations are immanent within social interactions. Within the ethical context a critical issue as an insider researcher is to ensure that study participants are not responding in a way that is influenced by the relations of power within the interaction. Participants should have the freedom to make their choice to contribute to the study, to share their beliefs and views but be confident that these will not be used or held against them in future interactions. The use of consent forms (see Appendix 2 and 4 for

examples). The relationship and power dynamic between the researcher and the study participants was reviewed with the intention of renegotiation if required throughout the study (Foucault, 1978). This was exemplified through the offer of providing careers support to study participants who requested it outside of the research project.

The success of the ethical relationship can be measured by participants' willingness to engage and be honest in their responses. This is defined by the trust relationship developed between the researcher and the study participant, recognising that the ultimate outcome cannot be controlled by one party and that power is intentional and non-subjective (Lynch, 2011). Coy (2006) posits important issues when researching individuals with whom the researcher has an existing relationship. This needed to be considered, even though the participants might not have explicit vulnerabilities. The taking of the role of a participant in the research and what this might reveal is the issue here. As a tutor for the programme it was essential that the role did not create tension with the role of researcher. Concerns from participants can focus on who is conducting the research and how the information may eventually be used. This was clearly explained to participants through the consent statements and verbally at the start of the interviews.

Crow (2000) suggests that research can disempower individuals by taking information and using it in a way that may disadvantage those who have provided it. It can also empower them in providing them with knowledge and a voice which gives them control over their own destiny. Carroll (1998) provided a useful framework to inform ethical decision-making. The approach ensured that participants felt they were gaining from the experience and that outcomes for them would have a positive effect and so promote reciprocity. Costley and Gibbs (2006) focus on the benefits of the research to the group in developing their community of practice; this again reinforces reciprocity.

Throughout the design phase of the project ethical concerns were considered and potential impacts explored. Special consideration was given to ensuring that the four

elements of ethics were adhered to; autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice (Gorman, 2007). Throughout the research trust relationships were established between the researcher and the participant. It was essential that the integrity of these relationships be maintained through to the dissemination process. This was achieved through providing participants with copies of publications resulting from the research.

3.7 Methods

3.7.1 Introduction

This section describes the selection, application and analysis of each tool within the multi-method approach. What is presented is an approach which aims to address an interpretivist approach investigating and interpreting meanings and human actions to produce verbal descriptions and explanations (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1995). This research study incorporated key elements beneficially utilising a purposefully defined set of tools that facilitated the exploration of the question, which explored the role of postgraduate study and its contribution to professional identity for career practitioners.

3.7.2 Rationale for selection of methods

Conducting the research within a qualitative paradigm provides the researcher with opportunities to explore and examine a range of methodologies and approaches. The location of the research as a case study offered a plethora of opportunities to engage with the participants in understanding the meaning of human action as empathic identification or *Verstehen* (Schwandt, 2000) whereby the research aims to understand human behaviour rather than predict it. As such, methods were selected which would support the researcher in understanding the individual situation of the participants, as far as possible, but also to ensure that findings could be confirmed through triangulation.

The selected approach offered the opportunity to explore different facets of the research question in a way that was pertinent (Oliver, 2010). The range of methods

selected provided this through engaging with a sample of the student body via in-depth discussions and narrative aspects of the study while including a larger student group in the broader survey. The quantity of data collection is often an issue for this type of research project. Silverman (2001) proffers that it is important to decide which data is most appropriate to the project and to ensure effective analysis.

The use of multiple data sources avoids the risk of reliance on one type of data which could lead to method dependence (Hammersely and Atkinson, 1983). The trustworthiness of the project was therefore enhanced by the time span over which the research project was conducted. The different phases of data collection occurring over a period of three years allowed for a fluidity of participant involvement as students joining the course could contribute at the different phases.

3.7.3 Achieving trustworthiness in data collection

Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) argue that we are part of a social world and therefore we cannot escape this in order to study it. They argue that the researcher is an active part of the research process itself. As such the role of the researcher is explicit within fieldwork where the interpretations of the observations have formed the research evidence (Malin, 2003). Reid (2007) argues that the researcher is located within the research and brings their own interpretative frames of reference. The use of an interpretative perspective allows the researcher to focus on the views and individual contexts of the participants contributing to the study (Radnor, 2002). An additional attraction is the opportunity to explicitly locate the researcher within the research and to recognise their own experience in interpreting the data (Webb, 2000; Radnor, 2002; Bryman and Cassell 2006). Trustworthiness within the context of qualitative research is often questioned. However, Savage (2006) argues that qualitative research can provide re-assurance in relation to its rigour through

Providing a clear account of how data has been collected, analysed, and interpreted, with sufficient display of the data to allow the reader to assess whether the researcher's interpretation is supported...there should be signs of in-depth reflection on the ways in which the research data are influenced by the research process (Savage, 2006:389)

Rock (2001:31) suggests that the uniqueness of experiences and interactions of the researcher within the field makes it difficult to attempt replication of comparisons of findings, as situations and individuals do not stay the same and consequently will not view the same things in the same way. As a case study this research represented a singular case, therefore the findings reflected the views of those who participated. Although Thomas (2011) is adamant that reliability and validity have no place in case study, it is still important to be able to evidence that the methods selected demonstrate rigor in addressing the research question. Trustworthiness is therefore contextual and is assured through the careful construction of the research instruments to ensure that they meet the requirements of the research project but also that they complement each other.

Doctoral study aims to create new knowledge in a specific and particular manner. Drake and Heath (2011), for example, propose that the newness of 'knowledge' comes not from the research domain specifically but from the combined understandings of professional practice, higher education experience and the individual reflexive project. This confluence of activities is unique for each piece of research and applies within the context of this research study. Drake and Heath's (2011) argument is grounded within the researcher/practitioner debate that typifies the relationship of research conducted in one's own workplace and the issues attached to this. The selection of approaches and tools which have enabled the research question to be fully examined was paramount in ensuring they were both valid and sympathetic to the nature of the research.

The next section explores each of the methods selected, the piloting and application of each. This allowed the selection of each method to be considered individually and its role within the construction of the case study.

3.8 Document analysis- applications and personal statements

All students applying for the programme were required to make a formal application, which was usually online. Additionally, applicants were asked to complete a personal statement. The purpose of this was to encourage applicants to think about what they

wanted to achieve from the programme, their relevant experience and how they would manage their studies. Throughout the course of the research copies of application paperwork from all applicants from 2005 to 2010 were collected. UK-based applicants only were included and those who had provided sufficient information that could be used. These were then analysed guided by the conceptual framework which located the key themes to be explored, particularly in relation to identifying the rationale and motivation for electing to choose this form of CPD. Together with the conceptual framework the theoretical framework helped to shape the parameters of the study. This phase ran concurrently with the survey as applications were continually assessed until 2010. The initial analysis of the applications contributed to providing indicative themes that were then assessed more fully in the survey.

3.8.1 Selection of document analysis of applications and personal statements

The documentary evidence consisted of applications and supporting statements produced for the purpose of programme application (see Appendix 1). Hodder (2000) differentiates between records being used in formal transactions as opposed to documents which are produced for personal reasons. The artefacts being examined here reflected both types as they were personal documents used for official purposes. The emphasis on the 'personal nature' of the artefacts supports the use of Hodder's definition of 'documents'. The documents were produced for a specific epistemological purpose and this required consideration within the data analysis. The documents therefore became deconstructed to become an empirical resource which could be utilised as a data set within the case study. The initial analysis of the applications together with the theoretical framework informed the selection of the concepts explored within the survey questionnaire.

3.8.2 Piloting of documentary analysis of application forms and personal statement

Prior to the analysis of the applications a sample of five was selected at random for piloting purposes. Each application had been allocated an identification number for identification purposes. Five applications were felt to offer a sufficient range through

which to assess the suitability of the method. The pilot aimed to test out whether this method provided information about the motivations of individuals applying for the programme and whether these reflected the theoretical framework. A coding framework was developed for analysis purposes and this was also piloted with the five applications. The applications potentially offered a rich source of data from interested applicants. However, the extent to which this would contribute to the study required consideration.

The pilot consisted of reviewing the selection of the documents to assess the content and information provided. The documents were assessed using a highlighter pen and annotations were made where concepts were identified that reflected those identified in the theoretical framework. A copy of an anonymised questionnaire can be found in Appendix 1. The pilot focused on reviewing the applications through analysing the information. This identified that they contained a mixture of information, with some applicants providing an in-depth narrative while others offered a bare minimum of information. This lack of consistency was helpful in that the researcher was able to disregard some of the applications early on in the analysis. The piloting phase allowed a realistic judgment to be made as well as supporting the researcher to become more familiar with the tools (Arthur and Nazroo, 2003).

3.9 Survey

In order to elicit and include as wide a range of viewpoints as possible when responding to the research question, a survey was considered. Denscombe defines the survey approach as

Having three definitive characteristics; combining a breadth of study, focus on a snapshot in time and dependence on empirical data (2007: 8)

Within the context of this research, the survey was applied using two tools, the on-line questionnaire and the semi-structured in-depth telephone interview. In this section the adoption of the questionnaire will be explored and the next section will focus on the interview.

At the inception of the project a primary consideration was to obtain the views of the students on programme, and of those who had recently completed or had stepped off at an interim stage. The views aimed to elicit students' motivations for engaging in the programme of study and their intended goals. As the programme was delivered through e-learning, an on-line survey was defined as the most effective tool to gather the data. This was because it was felt that students were IT literate and familiar with using on-line materials and resources.

3.9.1 Selection of questionnaire as a method

The rationale for selecting a questionnaire as a research method within the case study resulted from the need to adopt a tool which was inclusive and accessible to all potential participants. The use of a survey in researching professional identity and development issues is well documented (Harvey 2005; Dobrow and Higgins 2005; Khapova, Arthur, Wilderom and Svensson 2007).

The web-based questionnaire (see Appendix 2) was designed in much the same way as a traditional questionnaire. It was developed using 'snap' software, which is an online survey development package and located on a host site and participants were then emailed with the web-link and invited to contribute. The use of web-based questionnaires has become increasingly popular due to the proliferation of the internet (Bryman 200; Denscombe 2007; Bech and Kristensen 2009). Web-based instruments offer a number of benefits; they are both simpler for the participant to complete in terms of responding to questions and ease of submission and the responses can be automatically downloaded into spreadsheets. The disadvantages identified by Denscombe (2007) focus on the skills of the researcher and access to web hosting technology. In this instance this was not an issue, as the researcher was based in a university and provided with IT support. Bryman (2004) identifies additional disadvantages, specifically confidentiality, low response rates and the motivation for the participant to be on-line. Ensuring all communication had the web-link included and that potential respondents were encouraged on a number of occasions to contribute their views helped to mitigate these. It could be suggested however, that these issues are universal in research of this kind.

The questionnaire is often selected as a data-gathering tool because it is perceived to be an easy way to collect data. The reality, however, is different. The development of an instrument that meets the researcher's needs which is accessible and meaningful to the respondent and provides trustworthy data, is a challenge and is often underestimated by researchers. The use of a questionnaire has a number of advantages, not least of which are time and expense elements (Bryman, 2004; Denscombe, 2007). A central element of the self-completion activity is the lack of interference by the researcher which could potentially influence the responses (Bryman, 2004). However, disadvantages of this approach can include lack of opportunity to clarify questions and to probe issues, limited access to in-depth experience and feeling, low response rates and limited scope of data collected (Matthews and Ross, 2010). The use of surveys has in recent years become questioned, particularly in relation to business processes. This is as a result of business leaders and managers becoming disheartened with this type of method as they question its efficacy in relation to the low response rate which is blamed on asking the wrong questions (Savage, 2006).

Herzog (1996) recommends that when the goal of the questionnaire is exploration to identify themes that will be tested out in later research then combinations of structured and unstructured responses are possible. To ensure that the participants in the survey were able to share their experiences the questionnaire was constructed using a semi-structured approach. Silverman (2011) identifies authenticity i.e. being able to collect authentic experiences, rather than reliability, as an issue for qualitative research. This approach provided ample opportunity for contextualisation of the required numerical data. As the population size was relatively small the use of open-ended questions could be relatively widely utilised (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). This approach offered a structure while encouraging the respondents to reply in a way appropriate to them.

The semi-structured questionnaire sets the agenda but does not presuppose the nature of the response (Cohen et al., 2007:321)

The questions within the on-line survey were informed by the theoretical framework and the initial documentary analysis which identified the topic areas to be explored. The operationalisation of the concepts identified (Burton, 2000c) was then synthesised into broad topic areas relating to motivation for study, the role of research, benefits of study and views of the guidance practitioner as a professional and their professional identity. The conceptual framework guided the construction and delivery of the method. This approach allowed the development of a dataset that could then be used to inform the formulation and construction of later tools.

The questionnaire was structured using a variety of question styles, including a range of open and closed questions. The closed questions included dichotomous responses with routing depending on the answer selected, multiple choice and scaling questions using a Likert Scale to assess degrees of agreement and disagreement. Within the pilot stage a dichotomous approach was integrated within the questionnaire to assess the efficacy of the questionnaire itself. Ranges of closed questions were adopted both to provide variety and variation for the participant and ensure completion, but also the nature of the questions demanded a multivariate approach. The Likert scaled questions offered the participants the opportunity to agree/disagree with a range of statements to assess their views. Open question opportunities were extensively used to offer the participants the freedom to qualify or expand on statements used. These were important to offer insights into human behaviour (Burton, 2000a).

Although it is generally recognised (Bech and Kristensen, 2009) that response rates for web-surveys are frequently lower than those of postal surveys, often response rates to items in the survey are lower for those delivered online. The criteria usually applied to lower response rates for web-based surveys do not necessarily apply within the respondent group for this study. Members of the group were e-learners and therefore to interact successfully with the programme they needed to access online materials and resources. In relation to non-respondents for this study three emails were sent to encourage participation. The initial email included the informed

consent so that students were aware of what they were committing to and could therefore self-select whether to contribute or not.

Other criteria traditionally considered as impacting on the response rates are demographics, gender and income (Bech and Kristensen, 2009). Income cannot be assessed as it was not deemed relevant to the survey but gender and demographics would not appear to have had an impact on the response rates.

As the study evolved and progressed an important element was to test out the findings identified within the previous phases, by drilling down to obtain a better understanding of participants' thoughts as individuals in relation to the question themes. As such thematic areas were singled out from the survey questionnaire to be explored more fully within the interview stage of the study.

3.9.2 Survey questionnaire - piloting and application

The questionnaire was constructed and piloted with four students selected to represent the various stages of study, a new student, one part way through the programme, one who had completed a stage and withdrawn and one who had recently graduated. As part of the piloting process the participants were asked to comment on the questionnaire, specifically on the ease of navigation, language used, clarity of questions and length of time taken to complete the questionnaire (see Appendix 2). As a result of this the questionnaire was amended to make it more user-friendly. Amendments to the questionnaire included an expansion of the questions focusing on existing qualifications and changing this into a tick box rather than an open comment section. Questions were also included as to the length of time respondents had qualified as a career guidance practitioner. Additionally the questionnaire was reworded and used the term 'postgraduate' rather than 'masters' as one respondent suggested that not all students might have committed to the full masters programme and therefore might not have felt it had relevance. The final part of the questionnaire contained an opportunity for participants to register an interest in contributing to the next part of the study.

3.9.3 Survey interview

This research project sought to understand the social context from the perspective of the participants (Oliver, 2010). The type of interview selected was defined by the type of knowledge that was to be examined. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) suggest that the context in which the data is gathered is equally important as the type of data collected. As such the disparate nature of the research participants required the interview process to be accessible to all. Telephone interviews were considered as offering a practical, flexible and manageable approach to data gathering.

3.9.4 Selection of interviews as a method

Interviewing is specifically attractive as a tool for a range of qualitative approaches because of the flexibility that it offers in being capable of being accommodated within busy researchers' and their participants' lives (Bryman, 2004). The nature of interviewing can, however, take many forms including structured, unstructured and semi-structured interviews. All of these offer specific strengths and weaknesses. There is, however, often confusion about the terminology adopted to describe interviewing process. Arthur and Nazroo (2003) argue that terms are not used consistently and that 'semi-structured' can equally refer to in-depth interviews. Bryman (2004) agrees about the confusion and differentiates qualitative interviewing into two main types, unstructured and semi-structured.

This research project required rich and in-depth data and followed a qualitative paradigm. Silverman (2011) explores two versions of interview data; emotionalism represents an unstructured, open-ended style of interview focusing on eliciting authentic accounts of the subjective experience. Constructionism acknowledges that the interview may be shared between the interviewer and interviewee in terms of recognised common knowledge. Emotionalism offers the opportunity to engage in a greater depth, the unstructured interview, offers the interviewer extensive scope to allow the participant to direct and drive the interview. This can offer the researcher a significant insight into the mind-set of the participant. However, within this research project a certain structure was necessary to ensure the themes could be fully

investigated. The responses from the interviews presented a rich source of data reflecting constructionism. This supported the development of shared meaning between the researcher and the participants and acknowledged the participants' role in shaping the research.

3.9.5 Semi-structured interviews

A semi-structured approach, it is argued here, offers more breadth and depth in relation to the topic to be explored. It also offers a partnership approach between the researcher and the interviewer in facilitating created and negotiated meaning (Legard, Keegan and Ward, 2003; Silverman, 2011). Within this study the preferred approach provided the opportunity to integrate elements of the previous data collected from both the survey questionnaire and applications and to test out emerging findings.

Although there were a number of specified topic areas, these were negotiated with each participant, who was also offered the opportunity to present areas of importance specific to them (Bryman, 2004). The discursive approach adopted reflected and built on Harrison et al. (2001) who utilised a topic guide focusing on the two main areas of the enquiry; the location of the participants' practice in relation to guidance work and the extent to which engagement in study had impacted on their practice. This current study extends this by addressing a third dimension, the participants' professional identity and how study has impacted on this. Throughout the interviews the researcher sought opportunities to probe and clarify comments made by the participants to ensure a common understanding was achieved. The use of this approach in researching professional development has been extensively utilised by Harrison et.al. (2001); Dexter, Franco and Chamberlin (2006); Colley, James and Diment (2007); Colley, Lewin and Chadderton (2010).

3.9.6 Telephone interviews

The interviews were conducted by telephone. Traditionally the use of telephone as a method for communicating with participants was considered suspect because of the potential socio-economic bias and the sample potentially not being representative of

the population (Denscombe, 2007). This, however, was not a consideration within this research project as the sample was carefully selected and invited to contribute and all had access to a telephone through their workplace. The socio-economic argument is predominantly redundant, specifically within the context of this case study, but also more generally. In the UK 84.2 million phones are owned by 92% of the population (Patterson, 2010; Ofcom, 2012). The research literature (Denscombe, 2007; Matthews and Ross 2010) supports the view that telephone usage is similar to face-to-face, flexible and cheap. Although some of the visual contact may be lost the majority of individuals are comfortable in engaging with telephone-based interviews. In addition this project was also reflecting the Harrison et al. (2001) study, which used telephone interviews as the primary data-gathering tool. Bryman (2004) presents a useful comparison of modes of survey administration that focuses on face-to-face, telephone, postal, email and web. He identified that the limitations for telephone interviewing are complex questioning and the inability to use visual aids. This can be mitigated to some extent by providing the participants with the topic guide before the interview, as was the case with this study.

3.9.7 Piloting and application

The conceptual framework, together with emergent findings from the earlier phases of data collection, helped shape the topic guide for the interviews (Appendix 3). These were used to define the thematic areas which needed to be addressed to further explore the findings and test out the efficacy of the conceptual framework. A semi-structured approach was used to offer a structure with flexibility, allowing the researcher scope to probe and respond to issues raised by the participant (Legard, et al., 2003). To test out the efficacy of the instrument and the telephone as an approach a pilot interview was conducted with one of the sample who had volunteered to contribute to this phase of the research. The pilot was used to assess the clarity of the questions, the content, to ensure the questions were able to elicit the expected responses, and the use of the telephone for the interview. The tools and approach met the expectations of the researcher. Learning points from the pilot focused more on the practicalities of conducting the interview, including having

more than one number for the participant and sufficient batteries for the digital recording device.

A purposive sample of seven students at varying stages of study on the postgraduate programme was interviewed. The sample included two students who had stepped off the programme with interim awards to ensure both existing and previous students had a voice in the study. Confidentiality and anonymity was reiterated when the interview date was agreed. The interviews were conducted by telephone and were digitally recorded and transcribed. The data collected from this group of participants provided the basis for the development of the narrative biographies.

3.10 Narrative biography

Narrative biography was considered as a method as it had been successfully used as a tool in a number of studies, both in relation to the development of career counselling programmes (Geary and Liston, 2009) and in eliciting student perception in relation to their programme of study (Ibbotson, Davis, Morgan, Dolan, Parker-Jenkins and Kreindler, 2008).

3.10.1 Selection of narrative biography as a method

Narrative biography is described by Matthews and Ross (2010) as

The depiction of a sequence of past events as they appear in present time to the narrator, and after they have been processed, analysed and constructed into stories (2010:265)

The terminology 'narrative biography' is adopted within this study. However, Geary and Liston (2009) refer to the approach as a personal biography. The narrative biography was adopted in the study to explore students' perceptions of the formation of their professional identity and the contributing factors. It was hoped that the process of writing an account would support participants in making sense of their experiences (Moen, 2006). These would present personal reflections as to how the participants made sense of themselves within their professional role.

The narratives offered the participants the opportunity to engage in a personal dialogue to explore the nature of their profession and their relationship with it. The analysis of the survey questionnaire overwhelmingly testified to the need for participants to see themselves as professionals. The narrative biography was selected to complete the case study as the participants would be asked to focus on key issues emerging from the analysis of the interview data. The narratives would be different from the interviews in that the participants constructed them directly without engagement with the researcher.

The narrative biography aims to document the relevant sequence of events that were identified by the author as significant within the context in which they occurred (Moen, 2006). As a reflexive tool engagement within this process has consequences. Ellis and Bochner (2000) refer, for example, to consequences produced by the story. The potential consequences could involve the students reconsidering their professional identity through engagement with the study, as the study reinforces how they see themselves as professionals and indirectly contributes to their evolving professional identity, thus acting as an agent of self-discovery. Ibbotson et al. (2008) claim that practice can be informed through engaging reflexively and analysing personal experience.

3.10.2 Piloting and application

Students in the sample were invited to produce a short narrative biography regarding their views on professional identity (see Appendix 4). To support them, they were provided with the definition from Ibarra (1999) that was used with the in-depth interviews, together with five trigger questions. These were distilled from the findings identified from the interviews and within the domain of the conceptual framework. These were presented as a guideline only in that respondents should feel free to raise whatever topics they wanted. One participant volunteered to pilot the tool. The participant was asked to assess if the trigger questions were clear and were focused on the issues. No issues were identified concerning the approach from the pilot activity.

All students who were on programme in the academic year 2010/2011 and had not contributed to the in-depth interviews were invited to contribute a narrative biography. The sample of students was emailed and invited to respond; all those who did were informed of consent, anonymity and confidentiality. They were then provided with the trigger questions to help inform their thinking (see Appendix 4). The narrative biographies were submitted as an electronic document.

The number of responses was disappointing but the data was useful in providing another layer of participant perspective and an opportunity to triangulate the data already collected. This method also allowed views to be incorporated from new students who had recently joined the programme.

3.11 Trustworthiness

The rigor of each method was assessed to ensure that it delivered the expected outcome and extracted the data required. Each of the methods was considered individually, allowing the pertinence of each to be addressed, ensuring the robustness of the individual approach. Lewis and Ritchie (2003) suggest that the methods adopted need to be continually interrogated throughout the research process to ensure trustworthiness. They argue these should include sample coverage, quality of questioning, labelling of phenomena, interpretation and display. These provide a helpful framework in ensuring the key issues of trustworthiness are considered for each method adopted. A number of these key issues have already been considered including, piloting for each approach, sampling in section 3.5.5 and generalisation at 3.5.6. For each of the approaches the specific issues of trustworthiness were assessed in order to present a cohesive argument in relation to the component parts and the whole thesis. Thomas (2011) presents a strong argument that within case study research validity and reliability are of lesser importance, as the singleness of the subject is what is important. He argues that if the activity were repeated that it is unlikely that similar findings would be identified. However, he does agree that certain methods require this to be considered. This section considers each of the methods individually and examines the strategies

adopted to ensure that the integrity of the research has been maintained throughout the case study.

3.11.1 Document analysis of applications and personal statements

Scott (1990) presents four criteria for assessing the quality of documents; authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning (1990:6). When reviewing the applications and supporting statements against these four criteria, a number of potential issues emerged. The authenticity of the documents can never be fully validated as genuine, as the assumption is made that the applicant wrote them and therefore they must be their own work. This could have been checked with the participant within the in-depth interview but again the word of the applicant would have to be accepted. Their credibility in respect to being free from error and distortion raises issues, as the documents were completed and presented from the perspective and viewpoint of the individual. The issues of representativeness and meaning appear to be more straightforward as all the applications were assessed (with permission) and the meaning of the documents was relatively clear in relation to the purpose of the documentation; to gain admission to the programme.

The documents needed to be considered within the context in which they were written, their intended audience and the motives of the author (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). The potential power of this documentation is that it presents the messages that the applicant wants to share with the admissions tutor concerning their suitability for the programme. The indexicality of the applications, in terms of the meaning changing depending on the context offers the opportunity to identify the priorities of the individual. Documentary evidence of this nature offers what Atkinson and Coffey (1997) refer to as social facts and as such provides documentary evidence, which offers an overall picture of social constructs (Silverman, 2011).

This data source provided an important element in triangulating the data collected through the questionnaire survey and the in-depth interviews, as well as documenting the views of participants prior to commencing their programme of study. The context is most relevant when different data sets are compared,

specifically when questioning if they are comparable in similarities and differences (Hodder, 2000). In this situation they proffer an opportunity to assess the motivation and expectation of the applicant in applying for the programme, presenting a useful comparator with data collected from participants after commencing the programme. This helped to assess the extent to which viewpoints can change through engagement and also provided a useful link as data was analysed across different methods.

3.11.2 Survey questionnaire

The content validity of this approach was addressed through the use of different question styles, which ensured that the items measured were relevant and the variety of evidence supported the measure (Herzog, 1996). To ensure the tool was reliable a pilot questionnaire was used as described in section 3.9.2. The pilot activity ensured, as far as possible, that the questionnaire was clear and that questions could not be interpreted in a number of ways. This safeguarded against participants just guessing (Herzog, 1996). The use of replication of previous research questions is recommended by Burton (2000a). As such questions were often utilised in more than one tool. This supported triangulation but also helped assess if participant viewpoints changed throughout their engagement with their studies and the research project.

Trustworthiness for the survey involving both the online questionnaire and the interviews was assured through the synthesis of initial thematic analysis of the applications and personal statements, combined with application of the conceptual framework. The initial document analysis was able to formulate the motivational themes, drawing on applicants' choice of a postgraduate programme as a form of CPD. The conceptual framework defined the concepts identified within the theoretical framework and shaped the parameters of inclusions and exclusions of themes. Cohen et al. (2007) recognise that inclusion of all items can be a challenge due to limited resources and the motivation of participants. The construction of the case study has attempted to mitigate this as far as possible through the utilisation of a layered approach to data collection.

3.11.3 Survey interviews

Trustworthiness within the survey tools was achieved through the utilisation of digital recording of interviews and transcribing them. A number of the participants had commented that the activity had been 'therapeutic', particularly for those who were currently undergoing threat of redundancy. This approach also ensured that interpretative issues were addressed through the precise transcription of the whole interview. Triangulation with other data sources was supported through respondent validation, all participants were provided with copies of the transcripts.

A number of methods within the case study have been adopted to ensure the trustworthiness of the data collected. These specifically focused on ensuring the participant had remained an active agent within the study. This was achieved through the reflexivity of the researcher in adopting a Foucauldian perspective recognising the nature of the power relationship and the extent to which this influences all interviews and narratives (McHoul and Grace, 1993). This was further enhanced through triangulation to ensure comparators when reviewing and analysing data. Reliability as a term remains contested within qualitative research circles by many including Lincoln and Guba (1985) who prefer to consider 'dependability' as a more appropriate terminology. This takes into consideration factors of instability and recognition of continual change. The question of whether the same phenomenon would be viewed in the same way by different researchers and whether the same findings would be articulated remains however, debatable. Throughout this research a holistic approach was sought to ensure the range of perspectives, interpretations and triangulation supported the dependability and trustworthiness of the data (Anfara, Brown and Mangione, 2002).

3.11.4 Narrative biography

The researcher invited all students on the programme who had not been included in the in-depth interviews to provide a personal narrative. This aimed to reinforce the broad representation that had been attempted in the earlier stages of the study. An issue which required consideration was the extent to which the students' responses truly reflected their views or whether they said what they felt the researcher (their

tutor) wanted to hear. Matthews and Ross (2010) suggest a typology of narrative styles, which includes seeking researcher approval and legitimation. These have been considered reflexively both within the construction of the informed consent and within the data analysis process in this research. All participants constructed their own biography based on the prompt questions provided. This was considered by the researcher as their own work and therefore a representation of their constructed meaning within the context of the activity.

3.11.5 Triangulation of methods

When using a number of data gathering tools in a case study such as this, trustworthiness of each method needed to be considered both within and across the methods. The contrasting nature of the methods applied contributed to the level of confidence within the findings. The multiple data sets created within the case study allowed the uniqueness of each approach to be applied in addressing the different facets of the research question. This allowed triangulation to occur, which afforded the researcher with an effective way of demonstrating the trustworthiness of the research, in contrast to the potential over-reliance on a single method which might have biased the research and limited the range of experiences that could be observed (Cohen et al., 2007).

Silverman (2011) refers to the constant comparative method as a means of attempting to check the accuracy of the data collected. This was applied here to support triangulation processes, both in terms of testing out themes with the various participants and also emerging themes with the next data source. Longevity is one of the seven points identified by Maxwell (1992) to ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research; this, together with rich data, respondent validation, tests for negative cases, triangulation, use of quasi-statistics and comparison, all contribute to the production of a valid research project. These have provided a useful framework for assessing the trustworthiness of the data.

3.12 Approach to data analysis

3.12.1 Introduction

This section presents the processes and the approach adopted in analysing the data. Qualitative data requires an approach that allows the data to be analysed to identify, recognise and record the patterns that are emerging from the text. Cohen et al. (2007) emphasise the need to have clarity as to the purpose of the data analysis. Within this case study the analysis aimed to interrogate a range of data collected at different periods over a defined timescale. This broad inspection provided the opportunity to reduce, compare and synthesise the findings to establish the theoretical constructs underpinning the research. Through the analysis of extrinsic and intrinsic factors that influenced the participants, the study aimed to produce conclusions which could be theorised. Central to the explanation building was the interpretation of the participants' worldview and their voice within the study. However, the nature of that process and its outcomes must be considered within the context in which it is situated (Silverman, 2011).

To simplify this section the analysis of the data has been split into two segments. The first segment focuses on numerical data and content analysis. This specifically explores the analysis of the application forms and the quantitative data in the on-line survey. The second segment focuses on the textual analysis of the narrative data gathered from the commentary section of the survey, the in-depth interviews and the narrative biographies. The term narrative data is being used to define all data that is generated from open-ended questions.

This case study was composed of a number of data sets that provided the opportunity to utilise an iterative approach in reviewing the key questions or a process of constant comparison (Lacey and Luff, 2009). This approach guided by the conceptual framework utilised the opportunity to build on each of the data sets and test out credibility and confidence in the findings. Initial themes were identified from the review of the literature; these contributed to the construction of the theoretical framework and the conceptual framework. The themes identified through the

literature included benefits, autonomy, expectations, career progression, intellectual challenge, communities of practice, contributions of research, competence, postgraduate qualifications, CPD, initial training, professionalisation, professional recognition, professional occupational identity, technician versus professional, ethics, empowerment and reflective practice. The conceptual framework provided the lens through which the data could be viewed, allowing the themes to be considered and analysed. The themes contributed to the construction of the first iteration of the coding framework.

3.12.2 Arriving at the findings

These themes were instrumental in the initial analysis of the application forms and the design of the questionnaire. After the initial analysis of the application forms and the questionnaire the themes were revised both to include areas of interest identified and to incorporate emerging topics from the continuing literature review. These were then synthesised into the theoretical framework. Although no themes were removed new ones were added, for example professional recognition, confidence and developing colleagues. The theoretical framework guided the focus of the topic guides for the in-depth interviews and the narrative biographies as well as analysis of both of the data sets.

An important element for the case study was the opportunity to make comparisons across and within the various data sets to assess similarities and discrepancies between the findings. Within the content analysis the incidence of certain phrases was counted to help identify a hierarchy of ideas in terms of frequency. These were then used in defining topics that would be included in the succeeding phases, particularly the survey questionnaire and in depth interviews. The thematic analysis was conducted heuristically, allowing for a flexible approach in identifying new themes as the depth of analysis increased. This supported an evolving and inclusive approach to the data analysis, ensuring that participants' views were considered in their entirety within the context rather than simply as component parts.

All the data was reviewed on multiple occasions and over a period of time. As the data analysis developed, data sets that had been previously analysed were returned to. This ensured that the findings could be reassessed within evolving findings.

3.12.3 Content analysis

Content analysis offers a systematic and empirical approach to the analysis of documentary data (Burton, 2000d). Within the research, content analysis was identified as an appropriate method through which to explore the documents collected. This allowed a structured approach to be used through the identification of thematic concepts which could be quantified through counting the frequency of the occurrence within the data. Burton (2000d) warns that standardisation can be over-emphasised. Cohen et al. (2007) suggest it provides a useful way of extracting numerical data from word-based text. This supports the identification of frequency and hierarchical importance of topic areas.

Silverman, (2011) defines text as those documents that have been developed without the intervention of the researcher. As such, the application documents in this project were defined in this way. The documents represented the first engagement with the programme for the participants. As such it was important to establish the messages they wished to portray about themselves and their commitment to, and choice for their professional development.

Each application/personal statement was given a number, which became its identifier. Throughout the analysis of the applications key phrases were coded and counted. New phrases were identified and added after the first stage analysis was completed, which then formed the basis for the iterative analysis. All such data were reviewed twice. The first review considered the document in its entirety and identified emergent themes, particularly any that were new. The second allocated an initial coding; this linked the number of the application against each thematic area that was identified in the application. All themes were highlighted in the application using a highlighter pen and the number of the application listed against each theme identified. This produced a numerical frequency of the common themes identified in the applications. Once the documents had all been reviewed the data was collated to

examine the prevalence of key phrases and the context in which they occurred (see Appendix 5). Adoption of this approach at this stage of data analysis helped to formulate a sense of what the key issues were for the participants and to obtain a sense of priorities in motivations for study.

This data once collated was further analysed for presentation purposes using a tag cloud. This provided a visual representation of the frequency of word usage within textual content (Hinkle, 2009). The phrases identified from the data analysis were loaded up onto a website (tagcrowd.com) from which a tag cloud was produced (Figure 4.8). This website was selected as it provided a user-friendly approach and a clear representation of the required data. The rationale for using a tag cloud to present the data focused on the opportunity to present a visual representation of the findings. The size of the text relates to the frequency of articulated statements; additionally there is a numerical representation bracketed beside the text. The benefit of using this approach is that it allows a convenient way to visualise response patterns in text, but Hinkle (2009) acknowledges that it does not replace a traditional data analysis method.

3.12.4 Numerical data

The survey questionnaire combined a number of question types. Data collected included nominal data predominantly for demographic purposes and ordinal data for Likert scaling questions and multiple-choice to assess attitudes. To support interrogation of the data an arbitrary numerical scale was imposed over questions which used the original Likert scale, very important = 4 through to don't know = 0 were applied to identify mean. This method provided an opportunity to examine the concepts identified within the conceptual framework through frequency and narrative data created through the open questions.

Yin (2011) recommends that rigour in data analysis is derived by checking and rechecking data for accuracy, thoroughly analysing the data without cutting corners and recognising unwanted bias. Excel was used to analyse the data as it was an accessible tool allowing the questions to be considered individually for frequency,

but also relationally in exploring and comparing responses across identified variables. Within Excel each of the responses to the questions was coded alphabetically; this facilitated analysis of the variables at different levels. The depth of analysis was undertaken over a period of time; initial analysis focused on frequency to obtain an insight into 'big picture' messages. Focusing on these, the data was interrogated further in selecting out interesting findings and attempting to identify relationships across the data set.

3.12.5 Analysis of narratives

Thematic analysis supports the creation of knowledge that is both descriptive and interpretative (Thorne, 2000). However, it is also recognised that thematic interpretations have the potential to a charge of subjectivity due to the problematic relationship between the researcher and the data. This issue is ever prevalent and as such the reflexivity of the researcher is paramount throughout the analysis stage of the research in order to strive for social specific dependency and trustworthiness. Within the data analysis a thematic analysis approach was adopted as it emphasised the 'what' as opposed to 'how' things were being said. It aimed to identify themes reflecting the textual data but also provided a flexibility allowing for modification in light of new ideas (Howitt and Cramer, 2011). Additionally Howitt and Cramer (2011) suggest that thematic analysis has similarities with content analysis, thus supporting an integrated approach to data analysis across all the data sets.

Using several data sets required an approach that was reductionist but at the same time retained the context rather than the minutiae of data. Within case study research this can be addressed through 'within-case' and 'across-case' synthesis (Yin, 2003) providing the basis for identification and sustainability of patterns. In this case study the need to identify pattern is an important consideration in assessing the individual lived experience but also the potential shared experiences of collective professional life.

The revised coding framework that was used is represented here in Table 3.2.

Coding Identifier	Theme
1	Career progression
2	Professionalisation
2a	Initial training qualifications
2a (i)	NVQ
2a (ii)	QCG
2b	Registration – chartered status
2c	Professional associations
3	Professional knowledge
3a	Theory
3b	Competence
3c	Reflective practice
4	Postgraduate study motivation
4a	Benefits of study
4b	Expectations
4c	Academic skills
4d	Intellectual challenge
4e	Research
5	Professional identity
5a	Professional recognition
5b	Ethics
5c	Being a professional career practitioner
5d	Community of practice
5e	Autonomy
5f	Technician vs professional
5g	Empowerment
5h	Job title
6	CPD
6a	Forms of CPD
7	Policy developments related to careers work
8	Relationships at work
8a	Employer
8b	Colleagues
9	Outcomes from study

Table 3.2 Revised coding framework for narrative analysis

This was defined through utilisation of the conceptual framework which was informed by the theoretical framework. This was further enhanced by the findings from the data analysis of the applications and survey questionnaire. The coding developed for the content analysis was considered and integrated as appropriate. This informed the analysis of all the narrative data. It consisted of a number of key themes identified through the initial familiarisation of the data sets, and refined through continued engagement with the data considered as 'submersion' by Agar (1991). This is reiterated by Taylor-Powell and Renna (2003) who recommend a holistic review of all the data. Each theme was given a numerical code 1 through to 9; each sub theme within this was then given an alphanumeric code. In the case of theme 2, professionalisation, an additional level of coding was added using roman numerals (i, ii). These codes were then used to annotate the texts where they were identified. A cross-sectional approach was then adopted with the narrative data sets (Spencer, Ritchie and O'Connor, 2003). Appropriate text was then highlighted and coded so the data for each thematic area could be further explored.

The findings from each data set contributed to the construction of the next method within the case study. The cross-sectional approach adopted allowed the researcher to code and retrieve the data using the identified codes across the whole case study. A cross-sectional approach added to the initial analysis of the individual data sets which identified if key findings were only contained within a specific dataset.

The written responses to the questionnaire focusing on perception and experience were cut and pasted into Word so that they could be retrieved, reviewed and compared thematically and coded using the coding framework (Table 3.2). The analysis of the interviews was a multi-stage task requiring repeated engagement with the data. The first stage required a full transcription of the digitally recorded interviews. This had a number of purposes; it allowed the researcher to recall the interview verbatim in text while immersing themselves to obtain a sense of the nuance of the discussions. The transcription process was critical to the research and although it was labour intensive it also allowed the researcher to fully engage with the participant. Halcomb and Davidson (2006) suggest that the way in which the

interview is both heard and perceived influences how the data is transcribed. Ultimately this can also influence how the themes are arrived at. Recognition of the 'heard and perceive' issue was important to the veracity of the thematic inferences but also in ensuring the researcher remained reflexive throughout. There is, however, some debate as to the need for full verbatim transcriptions. Halcomb and Davidson (2006) suggest that annotated observations of behaviours are sufficient. Within this research the interviews were all conducted by telephone and as such no visual observations were available. The opportunity to transcribe therefore provided the researcher with many non-visual clues concerning the participant reactions to certain questions and also their responses. Examples of these included laughter, frustration and pauses. If these occurred and it was felt to have relevance it was annotated within the transcript.

After the initial transcription the interviews were replayed to check the accuracy of the transcript. Many of the themes were identified in the first replay as patterns in language and experience started to build. Following this, all the transcripts were again re-read and annotated where topics within the coding framework appeared or interesting themes were raised or particular phrases/statements were repeated. If they appeared more than once they were included in the coding framework. An example of an annotated transcript is included in the appendices (see Appendix 6). The transcription allowed each individual's views and perceptions to be seen within the entirety of the interview and the context in which it was articulated. The context was of specific importance as the participants worked in a variety of environments, so identifying patterns which traversed various workplaces was of interest. Being able to define patterns that were context specific was equally valuable.

Due to the lack of understanding of the term professional identity which was identified during the analysis of the survey data a definition was provided:

The relatively stable and enduring constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role (Ibarra, 1999:764-765)

The rationale for this was to offer a frame of reference to guide participant responses. The definition was used both with interviewees and the narrative biography participants. Respondents addressed the question relating to professional identity in a range of ways, some directed their response to each component and others more holistically. All responses were combined for this question and coded using the coding framework. This was then used to assess how practitioners differentiated the various components of what they defined as professional identity. This is discussed more fully in section 4.6.4 'Defining career practitioner's professional identity'.

After the initial coding was completed, the responses to each question were collated. This within-case approach then provided an individual set of responses that could be cross-referenced and compared with cross-case data. Organising the data question by question using the conceptual framework as a guide offered the opportunity to review holistically all the narratives in relation to the particular topic areas, thus aiding the identification of the similarities and the differences in views. What can often be meaningless when viewed in isolation can have resonance when viewed collectively. This formation of collective experience helped to establish the veracity of potential arguments and explanations of the findings.

3.13 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the methodological debate underpinning this case study. It has specifically focused on the adoption of case study as the appropriate methodology to address the defined research question. Within this an examination of appropriate data gathering tools, their application and analysis has been considered to ensure that a rigorous and trustworthy approach has been adopted. Throughout, the researcher has considered the theoretical and conceptual implications of the study and the nature of an interpretative approach in attempting to understand the perspectives of the participants. This case study has provided a unique and singular examination of a group of career practitioners who have invested in their professional development. Although generalisation is not an outcome from case study research the singularity of these findings may offer some

resonance and have synergy with practitioners, students on other programmes and tutors delivering similar programmes.

Chapter 4 Findings

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter the findings, which have been synthesised from the multiple data sets, are presented. They offer a synthesis of the views of the participants throughout the various approaches to data gathering in exploring the research topic:

Examining the role of postgraduate continuing professional development and its contribution to the professional identity of career practitioners.

Each section presents key discussion points identified within the findings. These address the topics defined within the conceptual framework including profession, motivations for postgraduate study and professional identity. Findings are presented and supported using verbatim quotations and visual representations where appropriate to support the arguments considered.

4.2 The study participants

The masters programme attracts many applicants. They reflect a broad range of occupational areas directly linked to career work and others more tangential. This study only included UK based applicants and students to ensure a level of commonality in relation to training and qualifications, work contexts, professional association membership, language and exposure to and impact of policy agendas.

This section provides a demographic overview of the participants contributing to the survey, telephone interview and narrative biography datasets. Demographics relating to the applications/personal statements have only been included for those applicants who joined the programme and contributed as above. The rationale for this focused on the area of interest being those who had committed to undertaking the postgraduate CPD award, while the primary interest in the applicants was around their motivation for study.

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Figure 4.1: Regional distribution of students in the survey, interviews and narratives

Figure 4.1 presents an overview of the numbers of participants contributing to the survey, in-depth interviews and the narratives. Although many regions in mainland Britain are covered, there are few representing Greater London and the South West. Representation within the study generally reflected the geographical distribution of students on the programme and so ensured a spread of participants across the country.

21 students contributed to the study. The majority were aged between 31 and 59. When comparing age with length of time in the career sector a picture emerged of a group well established in their roles.

Age range	Mean length of time in career sector (years)	N =
60+	7.5	1
46-59	12.1	8
31-45	10.5	10
Under 30	8	2
Mean	11.4	

Table 4.1 Age and length of time in career work of participants

The length of time (years) working in the sector ranged from 3-25 years with a mean of 11.4 for the group. This suggested that students on the programme worked within the sector for varying periods of time, but also suggested a well-established and experienced workforce. The amount of time practitioners worked within the career sector also offered a timeline in relation to changes the sector has experienced in recent years.

The group was relatively highly qualified. Figure 4.2 presents 56% of the students having a first degree, while 39% identified themselves as having a masters level qualification. Two of these had completed the programme of study, the remainder had a masters level degree in other academic disciplines such as sustainable agriculture and development and engineering. Students fitting into this category could be perceived as lifelong learners, demonstrating a commitment to ongoing achievement of academic qualifications.

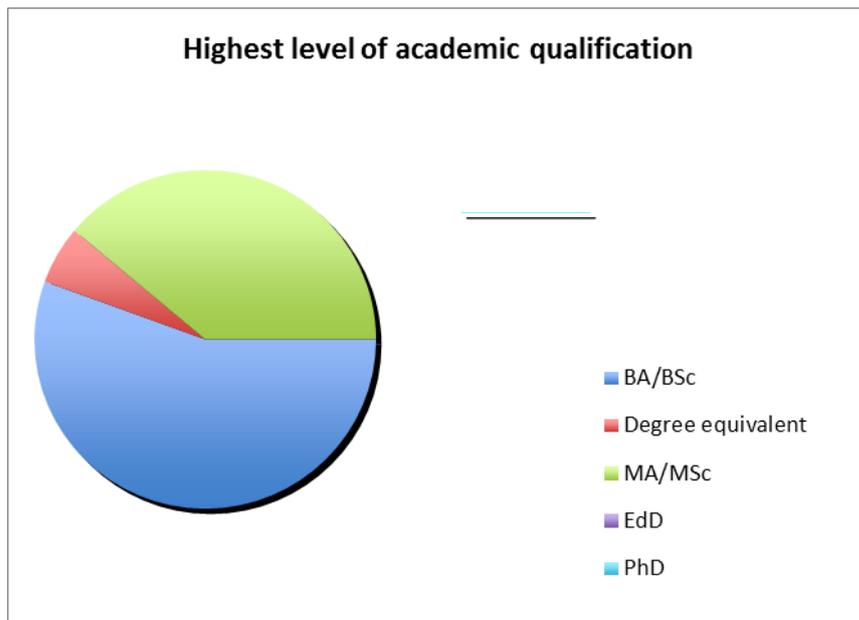


Figure 4.2 Highest level of academic qualification

As identified earlier, the range of qualifications considered as relevant to career practice is broad and the participants in the survey reflected this. Figure 4.3 below presents the qualifications that participants identified as being relevant to career

guidance. 17% and 39% respectively were identified as having the Qualification in Career Guidance (QCG) and its predecessor, the Diploma in Career Guidance (Dip CG).

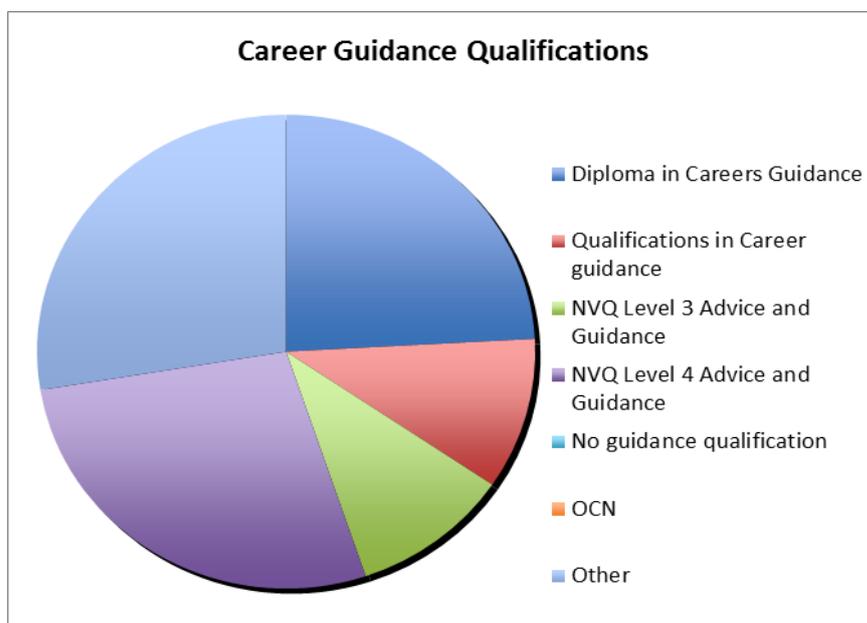


Figure 4.3 Career guidance qualifications

17% identified themselves as having a QCG, which could be seen to reflect the dominance and accessibility of the workbased pathway since its introduction in the 1990s. Those with the Dip CG reflected those practitioners who had been in career guidance a significant amount of time. In contrast more study participants in the sample had pursued the work-based route, with 44% having achieved the NVQ level 4 award and 17% the NVQ level 3. The majority of those who identified themselves as having achieved the level 3 had also progressed to the level 4. A small number indicated having both the NVQ 4 and the Qualification in Career Guidance. For some employers the NVQ level 4 was mandatory regardless of the existing qualifications applicants brought with them.

A broad range of other relevant qualifications were listed under 'other'; 44% identified qualifications which they felt were relevant to career guidance. These included the diploma in careers education, diploma for personal advisers, NVQ 3 training and development, PGCE, citizenship and their first degree i.e. Psychology.

Although some of these could be considered more relevant than others, it could be suggested that the lack of clarity around prescribed qualifications adds to the confusion as to relevancy of qualifications. One student who had no training or qualifications in the field identified this qualification in guidance studies as being their only relevant qualification.

Level of Qualification	University	Further Education	Work Based Learning
NVQ4	3 (30%)	2 (20%)	5 (50%)
Diploma in Career Guidance	5 (100%)	0	0
Qualification in Career Guidance	3 (100%)	0	0
NVQ level 3	1 (25%)	1 (25%)	2 (50%)
Diploma in Careers Education	2 (100%)	0	0
Diploma Personal adviser	1 (100%)	0	0

Shaded boxes identify that the qualification was not available through further education or work based learning routes.

Table 4.2 Relevant career guidance qualification level and location

Table 4.2 above presents the location of initial training. The Dip CG and QCG were delivered in universities and awarded by the Institute of Career Guidance. 30% of those with NVQ had inputs from universities as part of their training. Training for 20% of participants was delivered via FE colleges. One participant indicated their Level 3 was university based; the Open University was the awarding body for the award. These figures suggest that 30% of NVQ 4 initial training had a link with a higher education institution and therefore some theoretical inputs, but the majority (70%) were trained through work-based learning /FE providers, where theoretical inputs tended to be more variable.

These findings tend to reflect the amount of time practitioners have been in their role; those who have been doing the job for a considerable time are more likely to have engaged in the academic route, as this was the only form of initial training available. For those who joined since the introduction of the NVQ pathway (mid 1990s onwards) this represented the more accessible route. However, a small minority of participants still chose to pursue the academic option. Those who trained

through the traditional higher education pathway often perceived the work-based route as a dilution of the professional qualification, specifically in relation to the theory and its underpinnings of the role and practice.

Study participants reflected a range of occupational roles and contexts. Table 4.3 presents the student participants from the primary sectors in which career work is delivered. Interestingly some participants identified themselves as working in more than one sector. Those in the adult sector employed by voluntary community organisations identified themselves as both; also one participant working in an FE college delivering HE programmes identified themselves as working in both sectors.

Sector	CV/Application* N =	Survey* N=	Interview N=	Narrative N=
Higher Education	7	2	2	0
Further Education	11	6	2	3
Schools	3	1	0	0
Connexions	11	5	1	1
Adult Guidance	9	4	2	1
Voluntary Community	1	1	0	0
Other	16	1	0	0

* Number is greater than the number of participants as some respondents identified themselves as working in more than one sector.

Table 4.3 Occupational sectors of study participants

The programme attracted applicants from a broad range of occupations. Examples included minister of religion, social worker, police trainer and learning advisers based in a range of settings including the armed forces and schools. These

applications rarely converted to programme starts but provide an interesting snapshot of individuals who might see this qualification as having resonance for them. Participants who contributed to the survey broadly reflected the primary sectors within career work, namely Further/Higher Education, Connexions and adult guidance which have been dominant in all the data sets. This may suggest that these groups felt they had the most to say or contribute in relation to the topic areas explored. Schools and the voluntary sector generally reflected smaller numbers of study participants however; all the primary sectors were represented in at least one dataset.

As well as reflecting a range of sectors, participants in the study reflected a range of roles, which included:

- Team leader for a regional careers advice programme
- Citizenship/careers teacher
- Careers adviser (schools)
- Careers adviser (adults)
- Careers adviser (university)
- Learning adviser (armed forces)
- Trainer for Connexions
- Student adviser (FE)
- Curriculum advice and CPD
- Head of International and enterprise
- Head of careers

These reflected the breadth of roles that practitioners in career work have and the individual nature of job titles, which are often customised to the employing organisation. Individuals, however, clearly defined their sector or specialism. A number of practitioners also had management/leadership/training roles in which they were supporting other staff. This was often identified as a motivator for engaging with the programme.

This section has aimed to provide an overview of the study participants, their occupational roles, sector and the qualifications they have gained both in career work and more generally. The individuals that comprise the case study broadly reflect the career sector geographically and occupationally. The next section explores their views about themselves and the extent to which they perceive their occupational area as a profession.

4.3 Guidance as a profession

When asked the question 'Is career guidance a profession?' The majority of participants agreed. However, this was tempered with a 'compared with what?' Within the review of the literature and the policy documents presented in Chapter 2 career guidance was habitually referred to as a 'profession' implying acceptance as such by policy makers, researchers, clients, peer professionals and practitioners alike. Although study participants might perceive themselves as professionals this was not always how they perceived all career practitioners.

4.3.1 Definitions of what it means to be a professional

The findings suggest that study participants consider the careers role a professional one; the difficulty was often located in comparisons. Which occupations were they comparing career guidance with? If it was being compared to what are perceived and understood by the public at large as being traditional professions such as a medical doctor or lawyer this often made a direct comparison problematic.

I think a lot of it is what society deems to be a profession and you know there are some occupations that are clearly understood to be a profession; it might be medicine or law. But when it comes to adult guidance as a profession and whether it is even recognised or understood as a profession? It is probably understood as an occupation [adult careers adviser A, interview]

I find this an incredibly difficult topic as I said because of the roles you normally think of as professional, like doctors and lawyers, that have what I see and what most people see as very preconceived ideas of what they do and what they don't do [educational adviser, interview]

When I think of 'profession' I picture a teacher, lawyer, doctor or social worker. I do not see my role as part of the same class of profession [adult adviser B, narrative]

I consider guidance to be a profession. We have a body of knowledge and theory which influences our practice...I AM FRUSTRATED BECAUSE (*respondent's emphasis*) others don't always give us parity of esteem because they misunderstand our role and service and because of this it is often viewed as a service and not a profession [curriculum adviser, Connexions, survey]

Practitioners differentiated types of professions; law and medicine were seen as elite professions. The views above present a sense of uncertainty as to the professional status of the occupation; much of the discussion was located within what others think of and define as a 'profession'. Additionally the recognised body of knowledge that these professions represent was used as an element of differentiation.

When compared with other public sector professions, such as teaching, youth work and social work for example, the sense of parity was easier to equate. The public sector professions were seen to have a clearer affinity than those considered the more traditional/elite professions.

I would. Yes people like teachers and social workers and youth work, all the periphery roles [personal adviser A, Connexions, interview]

Guidance should be recognised alongside teaching within the education sector [student adviser, FE, survey]

Many approached the question from a theoretical perspective as opposed to defining what being a professional meant to them. Throughout all the data sets a relationship was perceived between having a recognised body of knowledge and defining oneself as a professional.

I only started the course in September but I already feel that this is my chosen career rather than a set of skills I exhibit that are easily transferable to other advice roles. This is due to the theoretical knowledge I am gaining and starting to feel part of the ongoing debate into aspects of career policy and theory [adult careers adviser, B, narrative]

Guidance is a profession that uses a body of theory and knowledge to provide a service [personal adviser A, Connexions, survey]

Other participants attempted to define the concept of profession within a practitioner/client relationship and the impact that they can have on clients' lives.

Doing it properly [guidance] will transform and affect somebody's life dramatically. So it is a profession, because what you are doing is having a definite impact on the lives of others [careers adviser, FE College, interview]

I consider it to be a profession which is crucial in supporting young people achieve against the five outcomes of Every Child Matters [trainer, Connexions, survey]

Practitioners described their roles as rewarding, it made them feel good about themselves and that they had a positive impact on other people's lives. For others it focused on confidence in 'knowing what you should be within your role and how you should do it', 'striving to be the best you can be' and 'enjoyment in your work'. Many of these comments were located within the need to maintain professional standards at a time when the pressures of delivering services were increasing due to targets and changing policy demands. When exploring what practitioners aimed to achieve from taking the programme, 95% identified both improving their professional practice with clients and developing their theoretical knowledge as very important or important to them. Therefore these two criteria were specific in defining outcomes for the participants in engaging in study at this level. Within the survey 100% felt that engaging in the postgraduate award would benefit the sector by enhancing the quality of services to clients. This reinforces the importance of the practitioner /client relationship and the centrality of this within professional practice.

For those participants working with young people there was some differentiation between those who had worked in career work prior to Connexions and those who had been recruited directly as personal advisers. It was perceived that those who had joined directly as a personal adviser were identified as seeing themselves as lesser professionals due to the generic nature of their role. This was identified also for a practitioner working in a generic educational guidance role. They felt the

generic nature of their role prohibited them from viewing themselves as being in a 'profession', but nevertheless they delivered a professional role. Specialism in career work was therefore seen by some as a condition of professionalism, with those who had a more generic role considering themselves differently. This was often related to initial training and qualification routes pursued into careers work.

4.3.2 Initial training and qualifications

It was recognised by the majority in the study that most careers practitioners will have undergone some form of initial training and development. This was perceived as a key issue in the 'are we a 'profession'?' debate.

The loose qualifications framework and the wide range of acceptable entry qualifications as well as poor quality of initial training are all detrimental factors towards the professionalisation of guidance [adult careers adviser A, survey]

The view of those who undertook the HE qualification (Diploma in Career Guidance/Qualification in Career Guidance) generally considered the NVQ as an inferior qualification.

I am afraid for me NVQ does still stand for Not Very Qualified [university careers adviser, interview]

This sounds awfully elitist – but I am aware of NVQ trained advisers who have no depth of understanding of the 'guidance' process and have never engaged with academic theory [specialist careers adviser, survey]

Many who had taken the NVQ route also shared this view. Interestingly there was no suggestion that those with the academic level qualification were perceived as more professional than their vocationally qualified colleagues.

The group undertaking the NVQ route could be divided further into those who undertook their initial training with a Connexions/Careers Company and received an input on theory usually from a University running the QCG award and those with no theoretical inputs (see Figure 4.4 below). Those receiving theory were more positive about their training experience and in many ways equated to the QCG, but with a greater focus on skills.

I was so lucky when I did my level 4 with XXXX University. There was a lot of theory involved in it and I felt like I had a proper qualification.
[head of careers, FE/HE specialist college, interview]

This lack of commonality in relation to initial training creates a perceived elitism between those who have engaged in the theoretical elements of training with a university and those who have only experienced skills-based instruction.

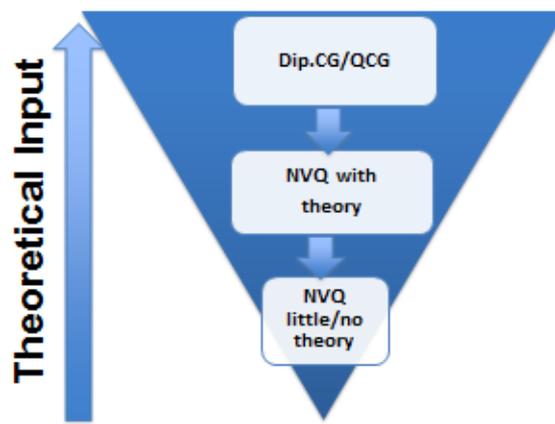


Figure 4.4 Three levels of qualification type identified by participants

4.3.3 Professionalising the career guidance sector

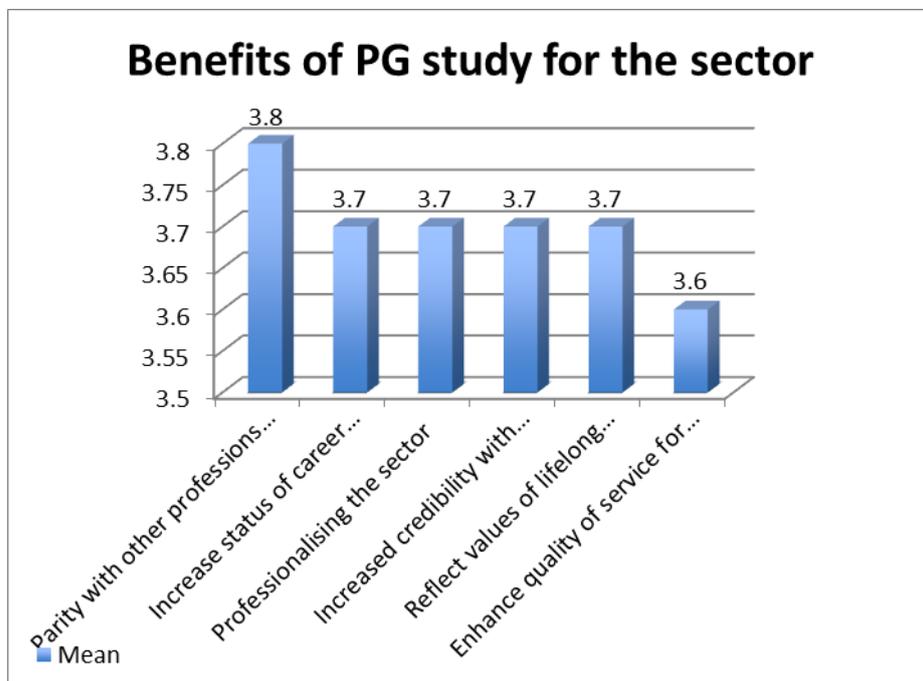
For those who might not consider themselves as a ‘professional’ within the traditionally recognised definitions, all considered themselves as providing a professional service to the individuals with whom they worked, although for some the use of the word ‘service’ did not equate with the concept of professionalism. Many spoke of delivering a ‘professional service’, yet there was little evidence offered as to what a professional service might look like. For a small number of participants there was criticism of colleagues perceived as not being professional. This was often located in perceptions of poor practice and a lack of interest in self-improvement or commitment to professional development.

All around I see poor practice, a disinterest in improvement and little or no knowledge (of all aspects of professional guidance practice

theory, policy, ethics, skills such as counselling etc.) [adult careers adviser C, survey]

I do know people, they have done the qualifications and they don't do anything, they don't know anything more that when they did the qualifications [careers adviser A, FE interview]

Participants identified this emphasis on self-improvement and continuing professional development as a key criterion of professional practice and being considered as a professional. There were concerns raised by participants as to the number of practitioners who had achieved their 'professional' qualification and invested very little in development activities after this. This could be perceived as contributing to practitioners choosing a postgraduate form of CPD and seeing themselves as more professional than their colleagues.



Legend 4=very important, 3= important, 2= neutral, 1 = not important, 0=don't know

Figure 4.5 Benefits of PG study for the career sector

Figure 4.5 presents the high value that survey participants placed on the image of the sector and how it was perceived. To interrogate the data further an arbitrary numerical scale was imposed over the original options. The responses to question 23 presented all the components as achieving a score nearer to very important than

important and therefore, all being of higher importance to the participants, parity to other professions was rated the highest. This suggested a close alignment in views of participants in relation to the professionalisation of the career guidance sector and that as individuals the participants had commitment to the professionalising of the sector and it could be argued that they personally sought to contribute to this through gaining higher-level qualifications.

4.3.4 Professional associations

Professional associations provide an important part of the professional context in relation to communities of practice and professional development activities, and act as a collective focus for members. When considering membership of professional associations responses were varied.

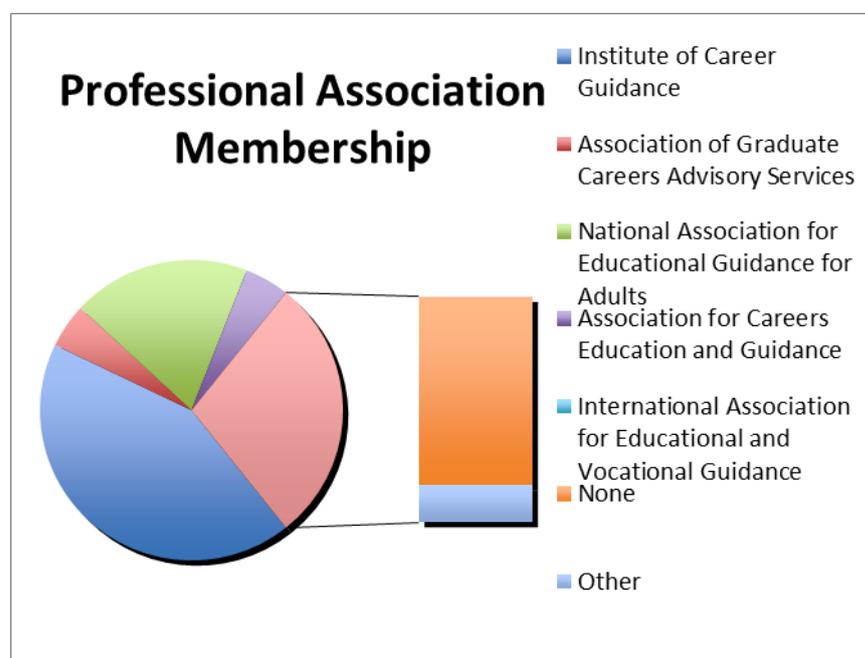


Figure 4.6 Memberships of professional associations

Over 28% of the respondents to the survey were not members of any professional association linked to the career guidance sector, but 50% were members of the Institute of Career Guidance, the largest of the associations (see Figure 4.6). Some participants were members of more than one professional association. Only one individual paid their own membership, the remainder having their subscription paid

by their employer. Others previously had membership but as their companies no longer funded corporate membership they chose not to take out individual membership.

The view on membership varied considerably. Some really valued being part of a professional association and the benefits it brought, particularly networking and the opportunity to meet colleagues from across the sector. Others were quite critical of some of the professional associations in that they felt they had not supported the membership well, particularly in relation to many of the changes that have occurred over the recent decade or so, such as the introduction of the NVQ and Connexions. The sense generally was of ambivalence. If their employer was willing to pay membership fees they were happy to be members, but did not generally seek membership directly on their own behalf.

Those working in Higher Education were all members of The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS). This is an organisational membership body whereby the university careers service is the member. This contributes to the perceived view of HE practitioners being more professionalised than other parts of the sector. This suggests the corporate membership approach to professional associations, whereby all staff are included, offers a greater cohesion and supports a sense of professional identity.

When we were XXXX Careers we used to get an email on a yearly basis asking us if we wanted to join.... There was a huge discount...There has certainly been nothing like that in the last 5 or 6 years at least. Again I am guessing because there is this whole thing about we are not career guidance we are not career specialists [personal adviser A, Connexions, interview]

I feel, I think working in higher education there is more of an identity because I think AGCAS has been very successful and in trying to promote that and represent the body of careers advisers in higher education and I think they have done it quite well over the years and so they represent themselves to you know whoever employers, government whatever [university careers adviser, interview]

The next section explores participants' views of how they think others perceive them including their managers, clients and other allied professionals with whom they interact.

4.3.5 Perceptions of others: allied professions, employers, managers and clients

Within the definitions of 'professional' the role of society and the perceptions of others hold an important place. As has been identified earlier many participants considered their role comparatively with colleagues working in allied professions such as teaching and social work to assess the extent to which they perceived themselves as professionals. Participants identified postgraduate awards as being their highest priority in achieving parity with other professions (Figure 4.5). But a significant issue concerned how practitioners felt others perceived them and their role.

There appears to be a general consensus amongst study participants that people do not understand career guidance and what career advisers do.

I think they misunderstand our role and service, because of this it is often viewed as a service and not a profession [curriculum adviser, Connexions, survey]

I have clients who say I can do your job; this is easy just sitting here talking to people. They can't conceptualise at all the levels of skills [adult careers adviser C, interview]

This is reinforced by a belief held by some that anyone can do career guidance work. This view was supported by many anecdotes provided in the interviews including: examples of teachers in schools providing career advice, adult service users within the workforce being trained (at the lowest levels NVQ 2 and 3) and then claiming to provide career guidance.

I know that in some organisations, I am not going to mention names, they basically use ex-clients to deliver Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG), and they are getting matrix and they are not even trained [head of careers, FE/HE specialist college, interview]

So it seems that there isn't the same kind of understanding of careers guidance as a profession and sometimes there is an attitude 'anyone

can do that' (participant emphasis) [careers and higher education adviser, FE, narrative]

This lack of control over who can call themselves a career adviser and the lack of clarity concerning training and qualifications required for the role presented a major issue for all participants committed to professional development.

Yet every Tom, Dick and Harry have been rushed through an NVQ and call themselves a Careers Adviser and believe it
[adult careers adviser C, survey]

Because we are not chartered anyone can call themselves a career adviser and this undermines our status and professionalism in the eyes of the public [curriculum adviser, Connexions, survey]

There was a concern that individuals with level 3/4 qualifications believe that because they have the same job title, they deliver the same level and quality of career advice and guidance. For those with degree level professional qualifications and postgraduate level professional development this was very frustrating and they questioned the veracity of a profession with such diverse qualification levels and which still considers all roles as having parity. This lack of homogeneity of qualifications/training/status challenges those practitioners who are committed to their professional development and their confidence in themselves as professionally qualified practitioners. The level of qualification and engagement with a recognised body of knowledge would seem to be a key determinant, according to the study participants, as to who should have the right to call themselves 'careers advisers'.

The issue of perceived lack of understanding of the role was defined as prevalent amongst colleagues in allied professions such as teaching, youth work, and university lecturing; participants located within FE, HE and Connexions predominantly specified this. Within adult career work this was less prevalent as practitioners claimed to have less opportunity to work with allied professions or to network.

Connexions, which was felt to be more a generic service, both in terminology and work activities, was used as an example of the difficulty felt in attempting to describe the role and the nature of the practitioners' expertise.

You say to people I am a personal adviser and they say, 'What is that? What do you do?' Give it no merit, no professional respect and it's like anybody can do that, because at the time we recruited people from lots of other backgrounds...anyone can do it. So... {sighs} *researcher emphasis* [personal adviser A, Connexions, interview]

The ability to articulate the purpose of career advice and guidance is one that traverses the research project and will be explored more fully in section 4.6 Professional identity. As has been considered previously, participants perceived that gaining higher-level qualifications and raising the academic level of qualifications could contribute to enhancing parity and credibility with allied professions.

Within further and higher education the issues of acceptance as fellow professionals by colleagues within the same institution attracted a similar debate. Within these sectors career practitioners felt they were more often recognised as an expert than as a professional, based on their specialist knowledge. Within the higher education context the issue of peer recognition was related to where career advisers are professionally located i.e. as academic or support staff. This impacted on how they felt other colleagues perceived them. Career practitioners who work more in the curriculum field within universities were perceived as having a closer parity with academics and therefore recognition of professional status.

I know some people who work in other university career services where they are now regarded because they are doing so much with academics, you are almost...you haven't quite got the academic sense but you are not looked down upon, let's put it that way [university careers adviser, interview]

Within further education the issues of parity are slightly different. Many career advisers within FE had multiple roles and varying responsibilities. This often challenged their perception of being perceived as a professional within a dedicated role. However many roles they had, they defined themselves as a career adviser primarily.

For many of the participants a key issue was the lack of respect as professionals they received from their managers. In the majority of cases people who did not have a

career guidance background managed practitioners. For some, this was perceived to relate to a lack of understanding as to their role and what they do.

The work we are doing is respected but because we have managers who are just managers and they don't fully appreciate how much work needs to go in what we do... because some people you know take a lot of work and it might be seen by management as oh he's with somebody {laughs} *researcher emphasis...* and then I might turn up for work and they might say, 'Aw crikey! Can you just nip out there and man reception?' [careers adviser A, FE, interview]

Our new district manager has just come from the Youth Service and he says, 'It is just giving out leaflets isn't it?' My Youth Workers do IAG' [personal adviser A, Connexions, interview]

This lack of understanding of the nature of the role by managers who have not previously been a practitioner impacts on those career advisers who feel undervalued and unsupported in what can be a challenging and complex set of responsibilities. Although a number of the participants were managers they identified themselves with practitioners. With adult career advisers in particular there was a tension with management in relation to the nature of professional practice and managerialist agendas. The relationship between practitioners and managers would appear to have become increasingly fractured as the activities within the role, targets and productivity levels have become driven by contract requirements. This was felt to undermine the professionalism of the practitioner through a lack of trust, autonomy, respect and recognition of their professional practice.

In fact the manager of the service a few years ago, I actually said to him in an appraisal, about being a professional and he dismissed that. He actually physically, verbally dismissed it [adult careers adviser C, interview]

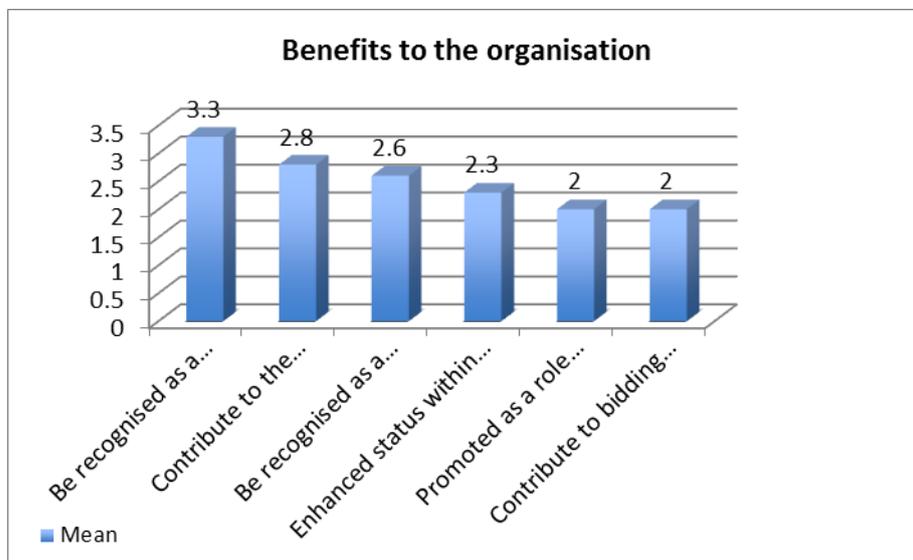
Some participants felt they were perceived by their managers as negative and complaining rather than contributing to a professional practice discussion and were often alienated as a result.

I won't go into details but basically we are seen as out there writing people's CVs and coming in and having a moan and so I think the whole management structure from the first level up does not see us as professional at all [adult careers adviser C, interview]

Others had the opportunity to share their learning with their manager and contribute to practice.

I have fed back what I have learned to managers and the team. It has been a fantastic experience – adding value to the work, as it is being recognised by management at work! [adult careers adviser A, survey]

As delivery of careers services has become more contract and target driven, managers tend to have project management backgrounds rather than professional practice backgrounds. Their role is to manage the outputs and this can often be perceived as at odds with the ethical and professional practice of practitioners. This tension therefore is both counter-productive and detrimental to the current professionalisation agenda. But this is not universal and is dependent on the organisation; some employers had an interest in learning from their staff.



Legend 4=very important, 3= important, 2= neutral, 1 = not important, 0=don't know

Figure 4.7 Benefits to organisation of PG study

Figure 4.7 presents an analysis of survey responses in relation to perceived benefits for the organisation through practitioners engaging with postgraduate level study. The responses suggest that, for participants, benefits to the organisation have less importance to them. Being recognised as a highly skilled employee was important for some, but enhanced status, being a role model and contributing to winning

business for the company generally attracted a neutral response. This may indicate that supporting business development was not perceived as a core role for them.

When exploring the benefits of postgraduate study organisational benefits were considered. Real benefits identified included the following: the development of new tools to support evaluation; research projects undertaken as part of the programme of study contributing to the organisation by developing new approaches to work; and stimulated colleagues to be more reflective and build their confidence in better understanding the policy agenda influencing their practice. The knowledge and skills developed by the individual were on the whole cascaded to help the organisation and its staff in developing their work, this presents somewhat of a contradiction in relation to views around organisational development.

I am more confident sharing with the team the things that I have learned and the things that I think will be useful for them. It has helped me to identify sorts of areas that aren't so helpful in other people's practice and be able to explain that better may be than I was before [personal adviser A, Connexions, interview]

Organisational development would appear to be important to a number of practitioners, but sector professionalisation is perceived as more crucial. These findings are somewhat interesting in that they suggest practitioner allegiance is located with the career guidance sector rather than with their employer. This is one professional trait that practitioners demonstrate, that is to say a stronger commitment to the occupation than to the current employer.

Client perceptions of career advisers as professionals were varied according to the participants, who generally felt that not all clients would see them as a professional and that they were more likely to be seen as experts. This was presented in relation to: understanding of the role, previous experiences of clients in using careers services, their expectations and their educational level.

The first three elements - understanding of role, previous experiences and expectations - could be inter-related as previous experiences and understanding of

the role may impact on the level of expectation. Many participants perceive that clients had unrealistic expectations, often expecting practitioners to be able to solve their life problems in a short space of time and being disappointed when this was not realised.

The perception of many of the participants was that clients may not perceive the practitioner to be a professional prior to having engaged with the service, but this changed afterwards. This was rationalised through high levels of satisfaction rates, for example an adult practitioner presented their over 90% client satisfaction rates as evidence of having given a professional service. Some participants felt that clients who had higher level qualifications and skills were better able to understand the nature of the service and what it was able to offer on an intellectual basis, recognising the practitioner as an expert. Unrealistic expectations would appear not to be educationally related, with both university students and clients with lower qualifications and skills having expectations that would be hard to realise.

With higher-level clients they quite often refer to me as an expert. It's quite frightening sometimes their level of expectation of my expertise. Other clients, especially in the current situation when we are interviewing erm.... I had one person say to me the other day, 'Sorry love, you know but you are a bit of a waste of space aren't you? Are you a volunteer?' A completely different picture because they have entirely different expectations, very practical they want to get back to work and they want you to do practical things to get them back to work tomorrow [adult careers adviser C, interview]

I think a lot do. Certainly see you as being an expert, which is different from being seen as a professional I do think that a lot, probably because they believe you can magically tell them just looking at them while you are on duty, their ideal career or they think that you know absolutely everything about any job in the world or how they can go and work in Australia or whatever they want to do [university careers adviser, interview]

Expectations were often around practical issues such as wanting the practitioner to do things such as find them a job or write their curriculum vitae. This then created an unrealistic tension for the practitioner. The key issue for the perception of the professional appeared to focus on the extent to which the client has a realistic and

informed understanding of what they could reasonably expect and the subsequent meeting of the expectation.

The fundamental issues for many revolved around status, recognition and respect. Without these three, being a professional was meaningless.

It's we can think we are a profession and I can think I am a professional but what kind of status have you got? And it has been that status issue a very long time [university careers adviser, interview]

I call myself a professional, but I feel that is more aspirational than real [adult careers adviser C, survey]

Participants tended to present a picture of a highly committed group of practitioners who were continually challenged by a lack of understanding of their role by managers, clients, other allied professionals and even other colleagues. Clients may have seen them as experts, but only when they understood the purpose of the role did they feel they were perceived as professionals. These findings reflect the views of one group of students but the participants work in different parts of the country and in different parts of the sector i.e. with adults, young people and FE and HE. The commonality in the findings as well as the variance can be seen to demonstrate that practitioners often feel isolated, through not having a recognised professional status, by the primary stakeholder groups with whom they interact, managers, clients and other professionals. This challenges the perception of career guidance being seen as a profession, if societal acceptance is considered a primary criterion. The participants in the study perceived that engaging in postgraduate continuing professional development could enhance the career guidance sector with key stakeholder groups.

4.4 Continuing professional development

This section explores participants' motivations for choosing to study a postgraduate award as a form of professional development, their views of CPD and how the programme of study was perceived to contribute to practice.

4.4.1 Motivation for choosing a postgraduate programme

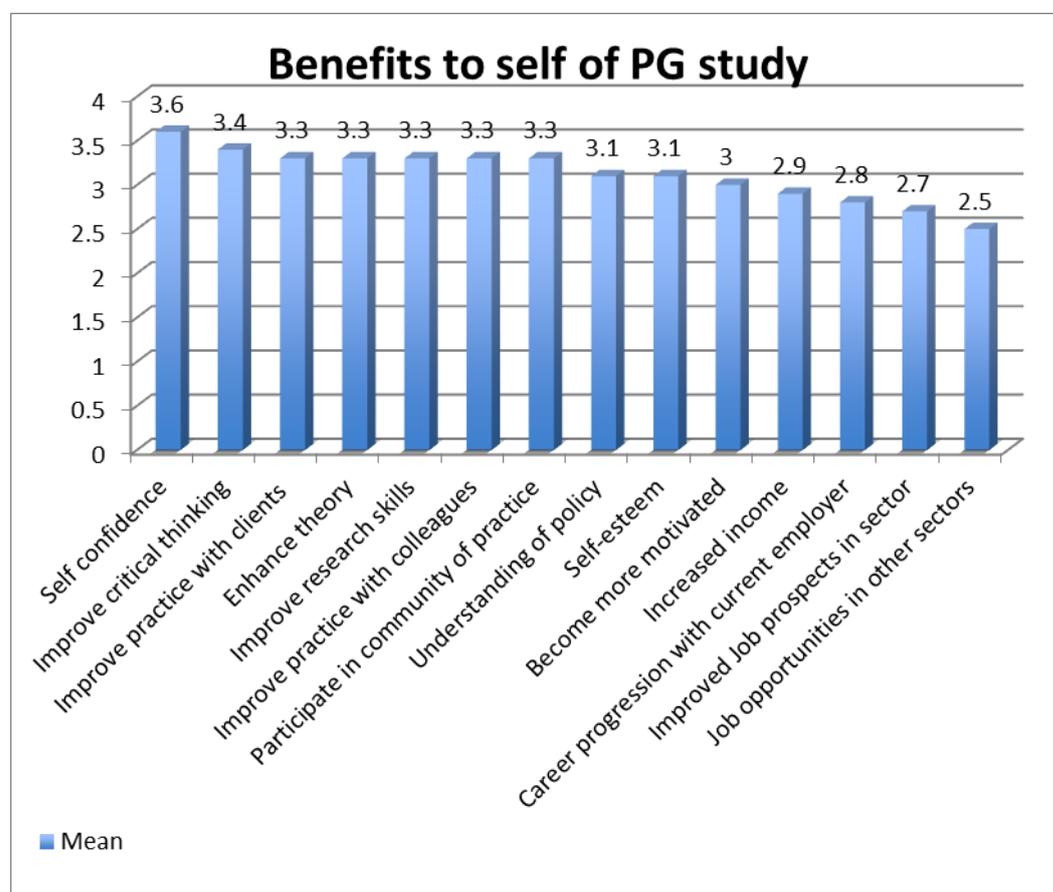
All the participants in the study elected to study the postgraduate programme as a form of continuing professional development. This in and of itself is worthy of investigation in that individuals have busy lives and all forms of higher-level academic study require a deep commitment. The motivation for this choice was explored in a number of ways through the applications, the survey and in the in-depth interviews to identify both common and disparate views. Figure 4.8 presents a tag cloud of the motivational factors identified by study participants



Figure 4.8 Tag cloud of motivational factors for undertaking postgraduate study

The motivational factors identified focused on career progression as the main priority followed by understanding theory and developing practice. When considering potential and current students separately, the primary motivations remain constant. It is interesting to note that a wide range of motivations were identified including academic skills and personal development activities such as confidence. Opportunities to contribute to organisational development and research were rated quite highly. Many of these findings reflect the theoretical framework.

When exploring the survey data in more detail, and particularly the participants' views when asked to choose from a list of priorities, knowledge of theory was considered the highest priority. When exploring what students wanted to achieve for themselves through their studies the findings in Figure 4.9 below continue to reflect the key motivations.



Legend 4=very important, 3= important, 2= neutral, 1 = not important, 0=don't know

Figure 4.9 – Benefits to self of PG study

Opportunities to use the qualification to move to other sectors would appear to be of less interest to participants, as it reflected responses ranging between neutral and important. This continues to reinforce the participants' commitment to enhancing the status of the career sector and suggests they see their future in it rather in than moving to a new career area.

When examining motivation for study in more detail it would appear that motivation is more likely to be influenced by longevity in the role. Older students were more

likely to have an interest in developing their knowledge of theory than their less experienced counterparts. However, in relation to career progression the majority regardless of time in role or age, were interested in developing their career, but this tended to be in the sector rather than with their current employer. Those who indicated developing their career was important with their current employer tended to also want to develop their career in the sector. Those who were neutral about one option also tended to be neutral about the other.

Also identified within the survey were more specific personal development attributes such as self-esteem/self-belief. These were important in helping to define many of the soft outcomes from the data. Some of these concepts were reinforced in other data sets.

I believe in myself more now and I just have more confidence [Researcher - That's brilliant] and I am more confident in sharing with the team the things that I have learned and the things that I think will be useful for them [personal adviser A, Connexions, interview]

More professional autonomy, the freedom to think critically and engage in policy and research and have the confidence to do that [adult careers adviser A, interview]

4.4.2 Theoretical knowledge

Developing a deeper and more in-depth knowledge of the theory that underpins career practice would appear to be a key motivator for a large number of potential students and those on programme. This is an area that appears to be lacking in consistency as far as the career guidance workforce is concerned. The in-depth interviews and narratives presented two perspectives in relation to theory, those who had theory in initial training and wanted to update their knowledge and those who had done little or no theory within their training. All agreed that understanding the theory behind practice broadened their understanding of practice and for many the theory element equated with their perception of themselves as a professional.

I now believe, as a result of my studies so far, that it's necessary to explore theory to be an effective professional, because if practice becomes routine, work becomes repetitive and one becomes a functionary. Considering how and why we do what we do develops

professional knowledge and influences practice, thus improving services to clients and one's own professional development and identity [FE careers adviser, narrative]

Those who had previously studied theory were keen to update their knowledge. But they also suggested that they had a real interest in theory, which had been a key motivator for undertaking a masters level programme. Allied with this, possibly due to their previous engagement with theoretical models, was a belief in the relationship between theory and practice; specifically that it broadened and contributed to better practice.

Those practitioners who had not benefited from an NVQ allied to a university course felt that their initial training was inadequate, particularly in relation to recognising there was something more rigorous underpinning their practice.

It was almost a salvation for me intellectually to find that there was something more rigorous and something more concrete, a basis for what I was doing [adult careers adviser A, interview]

This practitioner in particular demonstrated a thirst for theory and feelings of inadequacy in relation to practice as a result of limited theoretical engagements.

My assessor in my NVQ level 3 mentioned working with someone else who was more engaged with theory and introduced me to the concept that there was theory in career guidance, and from that point on, that was really early on, I kept requesting that. All through my appraisals, I need to learn about this, I feel a bit lost otherwise [adult careers adviser C, interview]

For many of the students who had followed the NVQ route the need to undertake the postgraduate programme was specifically to fill what they felt was a gap in their professional knowledge.

I didn't actually know there was real theory to what I was doing. I know Egan was banded around on the NVQ but it was at such a superficial level I didn't really understand how it connected with or translated into daily practice [adult careers adviser A, interview]

The relationship between theory and reflection was identified as important, as theory could be used as a lens to enhance reflection and thereby improve their work

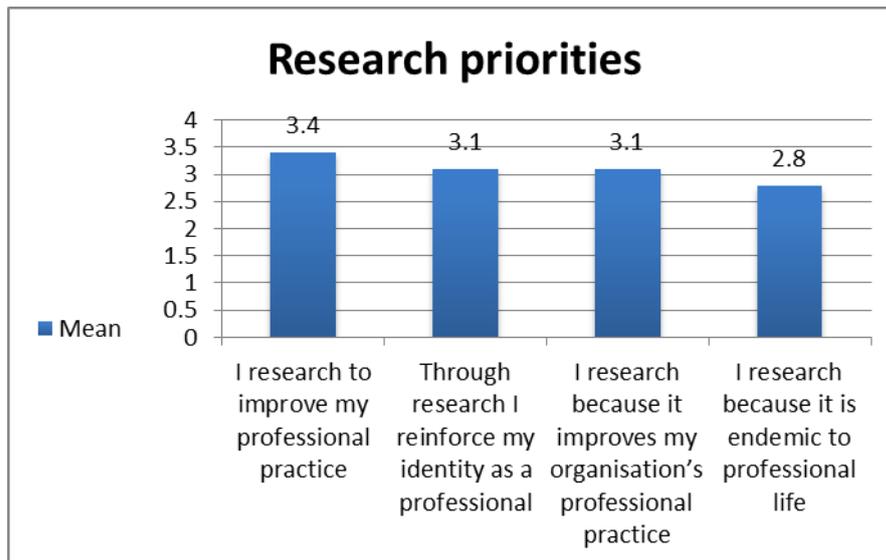
with their clients. This was also linked to the ethics of professional practice and the imperative of reflection and reflexivity as components of professional practice. As has been identified earlier, concepts such as reflection and ethics were not considered prime motivators for individuals choosing to take the course. However, for those who were on programme they would appear to have increasing significance. Theory was considered by many to be what distinguished them from other practitioners and consequently defined them as professionals.

Do you need to explore theory to be effective guidance professionals?
At first I argued that it's not necessary to explore theory to be an 'effective practitioner'. Simply by acquiring the relevant knowledge, skills and experience it is possible to be effective in a given role. However, for an occupation to be considered a 'profession' and hence the practitioner a 'professional' theoretical knowledge is required [adviser, narrative]

These concepts reflect those identified in the conceptual framework and present a perceived inter-relationship between professional knowledge and professional identity. The engagement with the theory provides practitioners with validation for perceiving themselves as professionals.

4.4.3 Role of research in supporting practice

The analysis of motivations identified research as an important part of the postgraduate experience for both potential and current students. Figure 4.10 presents the analysis of the participants' views relating to the purpose of research within professional practice and perceptions of themselves as professionals.

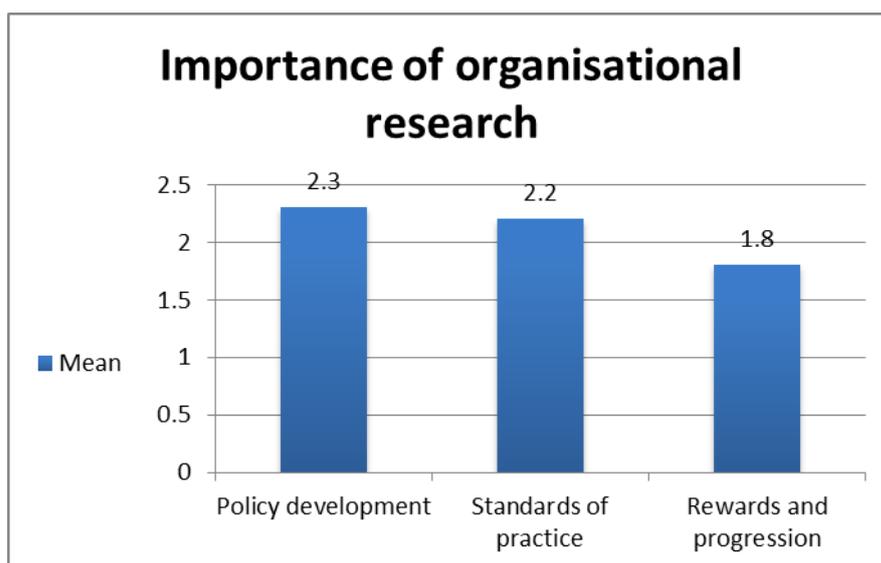


Legend 4=very important, 3= important, 2= neutral, 1 = not important, 0=don't know

Figure 4.10 Research priorities

Participants presented a strong commitment to research overall. The responses tended to focus on agreeing with the statements, improving professional practice for self and the organisation were prioritised with agree-strongly agree responses. However in relation to the component focusing on the role of research in professional life, 5 participants disagreed with this statement. This could suggest that although research is recognised as important to enhancing and developing professional practice, it is not synonymous with being a professional.

When exploring the importance of research from an organisation context the findings suggest a consistency of response. This topic was explored further to gain a deeper understanding of how research was perceived to support and inform the development of organisational practice.



Legend 4=very important, 3= important, 2= neutral, 1 = not important, 0=don't know

Figure 4.11 – Importance of organisational research

Figure 4.11 suggests a lack of either engagement or communication with staff about research being undertaken in the employing organisation. In relation to policy and standards the responses were predominantly neutral, while in relation to rewards and progression there would appear to be little recognition of the contribution of individual research to the organisation. This could also suggest that engaging in research has little value in relation to career development within the employing organisation.

In the adult service there is no requirement and limited opportunity to engage in research... Research is an almost alien concept which has been hard to rationalise within my working context...I feel as though I have to find my own context for research within my professional practice and that is very hard [adult careers adviser C, survey]

Although most indicated a commitment to research and its role in improving professional practice, there was little evidence offered of thinking about research or a commitment to research by the participants; only 39% indicated an area of research they hoped to explore within their postgraduate studies. Topics identified included: primary career learning, additional support needs (autism), action planning and changing organisational practice. In contrast participants were enthusiastic about the relationship between research and their practice. However, this often

focused on researching information on behalf of clients rather than research to develop and enhance professional practice.

Research within practice can be focused on providing information for clients as well as for personal interest and increasing own knowledge, therefore research is I feel two fold [armed forces learning adviser, survey]

I enjoy research and it improves my service to clients [adult careers adviser A, survey]

Research enhances my professional understanding of my role and enables me to understand client motivations and journeys better [careers adviser B, FE survey]

My research enhanced my practice in unexpected and exciting ways [specialist careers adviser, survey]

4.4.4 Definitions of continuing professional development (CPD) within career guidance

For many participants in the study continuing professional development took a range of forms. It can be something they have taken personal responsibility for, as in the case of the postgraduate programme, or it may be employer initiated.

Ongoing training is a vital part of this experience and this might be gained from specialist careers information events, education and qualifications training, updating of guidance techniques, networking and sharing best practice [careers adviser B, FE, narrative]

The in-depth interviewees in particular were questioned on this topic and the extent to which they felt their employer provided CPD to support them within their role. All suggested that their employers would claim to provide them with CPD but from their point of view this was not the case. Training was generally articulated as the most common form of CPD and these terms tended to be used interchangeably. The majority identified that CPD provided by their employers tended to focus on training in legislative requirements such as health and safety or activities which enabled them to meet contractual requirements.

All learning and training is focused around the needs to meet contractual requirements and the government agenda [careers adviser C, survey]

There appeared to be a lack of consensus as to the nature of CPD and its purpose. Participants tended to differentiate between training to deliver their role such as using specific management information tools or child protection, and CPD to enhance their professional practice. Overall the emphasis tended to be on different types of training. Few could identify CPD related to professional practice but could document employer led CPD to meet organisational needs.

I think any training I have had has just been to meet a particular policy agenda or organisational objective. It hasn't really enhanced my practice [adult careers adviser A, interview]

There was however no definition provided as to what constituted professional practice and how this differed from other aspects of their role that they were given training for.

There was nothing forthcoming and that was what started my quest really to find something that would not only help me as a practitioner but would help me in the role that I am doing as well [personal adviser A, Connexions, interview]

A personal commitment to their own professional development often led to frustration with other colleagues who were perceived as less committed. One participant used the word 'duty' in relation to CPD.

Personally speaking if you want to do a good job or the best a job as you possibly can it is also your duty to continue to develop yourself [careers adviser A, FE, narrative]

A number of participants suggested that some colleagues did not engage in CPD at all or had done very little since completing their qualifications. This was often presented as a rationale as to why not all career practitioners were professionals.

I do know people they have done the qualifications and they don't do anything they don't know anything more when they did the qualifications and it becomes pretty pointless [careers adviser A, FE, interview]

For many there was a sense that once they had successfully completed initial training there was limited further investment in them other than what was essential

and this tended to focus on systems and processes rather than knowledge or skills development. Some practitioners felt patronised by some of the training they had completed and felt that it eradicated rather than enhanced professionalism; one respondent referred to it as a form of 'infantilisation'. This suggested that attitudes and views of CPD are often very individual and not organisationally or occupationally formed. There was a sense from the data that participants perceived two types of practitioner; those who were professional and invest in their development and those who see their role as a job and are provided with the tools they need to deliver.

There were, however, some variations on the training offered to participants. This tended to be defined by the type of working environment and sector. Those who worked for educational institutions, in universities and colleges of further and higher education were often able to identify a greater range of CPD provided. This often included specialist practitioner training, for example neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), management training and mental health training. The multi-functional nature of these institutions ensured a broader staff development programme than for those who worked in a single function organisation such as such as Next Step (the former name of the National Careers Service).

The participants generally classified CPD as 'proper' or 'formal'.

I suppose something where you are 'going to' something, where it is leading to some kind of credit [university careers adviser, interview]

When asked to define 'proper' or 'formal' CPD participants viewed this as a programme which was credit or award bearing, was linked to an educational institution, or had real perceived benefits to practice.

I guess I mean a formal qualification. To be accredited and recognised [personal adviser A, Connexions, interview]

Felt like I had done a proper qualification but that was through XXXX and it was very structured and I like that type of thing [head of careers, FE/HE specialist college].

For others 'proper' CPD was defined more broadly as inclusive of reading policy and research and was perceived as the intellectual engagement in professional practice and developing understanding.

I probably mean mainly reading, reading policy, research, papers, articles, news articles, watching videos. You know anything that engages people just in, just develops people's understanding [adult careers adviser C, interview]

Much of the training provided was ad hoc and provided for a specific purpose; it was not considered 'real' CPD. The majority had attended sessions which were delivered through professional associations and were generally considered to be credible CPD.

I have gone to things like that but not a sort of formalised thing [university careers adviser, interview]

This differentiation is also applied to experiential CPD, which is being defined here by the researcher as learning and developing through practical experience.

I suppose it's not so much been formal CPD. By default I have got involved with academics and I've been doing work with them [university careers adviser, interview]

Now I haven't done formal CPD, but working in this field and doing this job in its own right is continuing development. [careers adviser A, FE, interview]

Practitioners could identify examples in their practice of how their work had evolved and changed in recent years. The most common one addressed working with clients whose first language was not English.

The analyses of the various types of CPD identified by practitioners in the study were collated and catalogued. The types of CPD tended to gravitate to three dominant classifications.

- **Operational CPD** represented training defined by and delivered by the employing organisation and predominantly focused on developing skills and knowledge required by law or contractual obligations.
- **Experiential CPD** reflected knowledge and skills developed by practitioners within the context of their work environment, which enhanced their

capabilities to deliver their professional role. This was identified as supporting the ability to develop competence in working with particular client groups that might require specialist approaches.

- **Formal CPD** included activities that were award bearing, perceived as having wider recognition or focused overtly on the development of professional practice.

This typology differentiated three distinct forms of CPD engaged with by practitioners. This conceptualisation helped to provide a clearer understanding as to how the study participants differentiated CPD available to them and the value placed on the different approaches.

Operational and experiential CPD tended to be undervalued by participants and were considered not as important or relevant as what they defined as ‘proper’ or ‘formal’ CPD. Table 4.4 below presents examples of the types of CPD that participants had engaged in. All participants engaged to a lesser or greater degree; all had experienced operational CPD and for some this was all they were able to identify. Those in Connexions, FE and HE tended to have greater access to formalised CPD and identified training needs which were met by their employer. Experiential CPD again was applicable to all, but what varied was the extent to which it was recognised as a form of CPD.

Type of CPD	Activities included
Operational	Health and safety, management information systems, legislation such as child protection, data protection, fire warden, quality systems e.g. matrix, manual handling, VDU, stress management, personal development
Experiential	Development of tacit knowledge, working with new client groups, awareness raising, using new knowledge and applying it to practice, updating knowledge within the work-role, teaching employability, observation of peers, working with allied professions i.e. academics, employer visits,
Formal	Conferences, certificated, accredited by a university or professional body i.e. the MA, externally provided training e.g. advanced interview skills training, safeguarding, counselling

	qualification, management qualification, neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), solution-focused, supervision training, theory for advanced practice.
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Table 4. Typology of CPD

Many participants particularly sought out the masters programme because they did not feel they were getting the type or level of CPD from their employer that they felt they required for their professional development. The academic level was particularly important for some as it had the opposite effect to infantilisation and it provided a differentiation from practitioners who had minimum level of qualifications.

You can feel quite patronised by some forms of training. I think you can have, I can't say this word properly but I did read it, is it infantilisation? So yeah you are made to feel you are back in the school classroom by some forms of training. [Researcher - Yeah]. But certainly higher education, university-based research and training has the opposite effect [adult careers adviser A, interview]

Although the majority suggested their employers provided very little CPD, employers financially supported a significant number of students in relation to programme fees. Respondents to the questionnaire identified that over one third had their programme fully funded by their employer, with another 28% receiving some financial support. 39% identified themselves as being self-funding; the majority of these were employed as adult careers advisers. In total 61% had received some funding from their employing organisation. Those who had received funding for their study identified their primary motivations as developing knowledge followed by professional development. There was no sense of an enhanced commitment to their organisation as a result of the funding provided for them; the motivations were around the self rather than around broader concerns. Thus although many suggest their employers lack commitment to CPD, in reality many employers were willing to provide some financial support on an individual basis.

They have been happy to support me so far because they agreed to pay half of the finance and they give me some time off for study. But it is certainly not anything they have embraced as a countywide thing or encouraged anybody else to do it. It is just a private arrangement [personal adviser A, Connexions, interview]

This could suggest that employers are more open to supporting those practitioners who are proactive about their professional development and that they do value higher-level qualifications.

The role of what is perceived as formal CPD contributes significantly to understanding the attraction of postgraduate higher-level qualifications. They offer formal, recognised, certificated CPD that would appear to be most valued by the study participants. The engagement in study at this level, therefore, tends to suggest an offer which provides practitioners with more than other forms of CPD; developing theoretical knowledge and research in particular enhanced practice development.

4.5 Impacts on practice

All agreed that CPD was important for self and practice. As has been identified earlier many participants specifically chose this form of professional development to enhance their work with their clients. For those students who have been on programme for a period of time a number of specific benefits to practice were identified; specifically applying theory to practice and engaging more reflectively as a practitioner. 83% of the survey respondents identified benefits for their practice, whilst those that did not unfortunately did not share why they felt this was the case even when invited to do so. Interestingly those who did not find benefits were all male practitioners. The sample size was too small to have any significance in relation to gender and only 20% of the study was male.

Throughout the datasets participants were generally able to articulate a wide range of benefits to their practice including: reflecting on practice, knowledge of policy, development of theory and practice and growth in self-awareness. The benefits identified reflected the motivations for engaging in study. For many, a key benefit was to be 'refreshed' as a practitioner.

4.5.1 Support for colleagues

A significant number of participants had selected the programme to develop and inform not just their own practice but also that of colleagues. When exploring the motivations for study, 'developing colleagues' was one of the significant areas

identified within the application data. This was reaffirmed in more detail in the survey where 83% had selected 'improving professional practice with colleagues' as very important/important to them.

I will also be able to add greater depth to my work with careers advisers [private trainer, application]

I have a keen interest in developing and training staff to attain the best professional standards in the industry and I believe that attaining the masters qualification will enable me to realise that dream [personal adviser A, Connexions, application]

I am excited by how I can help engage both staff and pupils in moving this area of the school curriculum forward, both in the classroom and in formal pastoral and care settings [school-based practitioner, application]

Those who indicated they were neutral about 'improving professional practice with colleagues' were also less likely to see benefits to their own practice. Although one respondent was neutral about this question, one of the benefits they did identify in the in-depth interview was how they had been able to shape and contribute to developing practice within their organisation. This may indicate that practitioners may not initially see opportunities for organisational development, but these may develop as they progress through their studies.

It's also made me try to get different things done within XXX. We now do peer review and of what we do it's not quite supervision, but that sort of thing. We are also trying to do a longitudinal study to see what impact we have... I think looking over a period of time it has made me realise that, you know, it's important to share things within the group but also as an individual. So I think, yes, it has changed my practice [education guidance adviser, higher education, interview]

There was a significant number of other examples cited including: delivering training sessions on career theory, ethics, updating colleagues on policy and the implications for practice and disseminating research projects they had undertaken.

There were two reasons I wanted to do it. I wanted to do it for myself for a personal challenge to look at my own work because I felt that we weren't getting any CPD or development opportunities from the company and I wanted to develop my own practice as a senior and to help other people [personal adviser A, Connexions, interview]

People have come to me and said 'I know you are doing your masters. Have you got something around this or have you got anything around that?' Particularly regarding things like current thinking around careers ideas and theories, models that sort of thing [personal adviser A, Connexions, interview]

In some instances they felt the postgraduate programme had increased their credibility with colleagues as they tended to be more often approached for their views or if they had any information on particular topic areas such as career theory or models of decision-making. Conversely the same individuals also often felt that their colleagues did not appreciate or fully understand why they had chosen to invest in this level of study.

I do wonder if sometimes if some of them think that I am a bit full of myself when I come out with, 'I was reading at the weekend duh, duh, duh' and they almost look at me as if to say. 'Why? You are so sad you have nothing else to do.' [personal adviser A, Connexions, interview]

It sets me apart personally; I don't know about other people. They just throw their hands up in the air, and they are very tolerant. Oh God its XXX again [adult careers adviser C, interview]

4.6 Defining Professional Identity

Throughout the survey, interviews and narrative biographies all participants were asked to define their professional identity.

Many practitioners within the study found this a challenging activity; often responding with, 'That's a difficult one.' Within the survey responses a number answered using a question mark. The responses generally fell into three categories:

- (i) 'I am a career adviser/education adviser.';
- (ii) 'That would depend on who I am talking to.'; and
- (iii) 'Difficult to describe because I have lots of roles.'

The first group felt emphatic that they knew who they were and what they did. This description was often aligned with a qualifier, "I work with young people/adults." For some respondents they made a point of distancing themselves from other areas of the sector such as Connexions; "I don't work for Connexions." It appeared

important to define what they were not and to express their specialism almost as a sub-identity.

The second group often struggled to define themselves as they felt clients or peers did not understand what they did and how they did it.

You say to people, 'I am a personal adviser' and they say, 'What is that? What do you do?' [personal adviser A Connexions, interview].

This lack of clarity puts pressure on practitioners to try and describe their roles in a way that might be meaningful to others. Participants within the study reported they often felt defined by clients' previous experiences of using careers services: this was often perceived to be poor.

They understand the term careers advice don't they, which is user friendly, but then that is what they will have been told they have had at school by the maths teacher [head of careers, FE/HE specialist college, interview]

The third group, which was composed predominantly of practitioners who worked in educational institutions, identified themselves as having multiple roles. Their primary role was as a career adviser, but they often had additional responsibilities around safeguarding, staff development or special educational needs. This presented career work in institutions as a multi-faceted role. It is one which can often have many additional activities and responsibilities added. Consequently many of this group engaged in a broad range of topic areas within their CPD.

Study participants tended to define their professional identity as their job title, for example, 'I am a careers adviser', by how they deliver their role 'as a very effective, experienced practitioner' or through professional attributes, 'largely through the knowledge and use of theory in practice as well as the ability to critically reflect and pursue on-going CPD'. This provides a useful insight as to participants' understanding of what professional identity may be. Within these three types a range of qualifying phrases included: 'qualifications', 'study', 'CPD', 'expertise', 'community of practice', 'reflection', 'research', 'feedback from peers', 'sense of pride and achievement',

‘framework of knowledge and understanding’ and ‘professional body’. All referred to at least one of these but often a number was used to describe their perception of what professional identity entailed. This reinforced earlier findings suggesting difficulty in describing the role of a career adviser to others.

4.6.1 Job titles

Many of the respondents provided their job title, some qualifying it through expanding on the purpose and nature of their role, specifically in relation to any specialism such as young people or adults. This contributed to the debate concerning the range of titles that practitioners use within the sector. For some they were clearly unhappy with the job title they had as it was not felt to fully describe their role. Those with more general roles often felt that the generic nature of the job title undermined their professionalism, their professional identity and how they were perceived by the people they worked with.

Different job titles further confused things, I was known as an Employment Counsellor and then it was changed to an Employment Adviser...As a Careers and Higher Education Adviser, I feel my professional identity is more defined [careers and higher education adviser, narrative]

The range of job titles presented reflects the lack of generic nomenclature used within the sector and organisations creating job titles which they feel are appropriate for the role. Practitioners often felt this was constraining and limited the help and support they were able to offer. Those who had the title of career adviser felt this better reflected what they did and who they were in relation to more generic job titles. However for some this was a contentious issue as the lack of heterogeneity within training and qualifications frustrated practitioners who had a higher level of training and qualifications but shared the same job title.

I have always clung onto the careers adviser label... I had only been qualified 10/12 months before the change to Connexions and I felt absolutely devastated. I felt that my professionalism had been ripped away and nobody valued what we did [personal adviser A, Connexions, interview]

I don't necessarily link myself to people who call themselves careers advisers now. A lot of people, who work in XXXXX, use the term loosely

and sit down in front of people and tell them how to write a CV [adult careers adviser C, interview]

4.6.2 Generic and specialist job roles

The nature of having generic Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) activities was an issue for some participants, especially for those who worked in Connexions. The re-designation of the job title from career adviser to personal adviser had a profound impact on how individuals perceived themselves and how they felt others perceived them.

I feel as a personal adviser in Connexions my professional identity is vague, it is a bit woolly.... Prior to Connexions I would say, 'I am XXXX from XXXX careers service. I am a careers adviser at such a place.' and everyone would say, 'Yeah, she does careers then.' Now I say, 'I am XXXX. I am from Connexions and I am a personal adviser' and they say, 'What is Connexions?' [personal adviser A Connexions, interview]

This is a difficult question for me to answer as I now feel that I am no longer just focusing on training in an IAG setting but across much wider themes. I feel my identity is being lost [training co-ordinator, Connexions, survey]

The inability to clearly identify a specific role actively presented a real challenge for some respondents. For others, predominantly working in the FE sector, having multiple roles was the norm, often encompassing generic student services activities and safeguarding responsibilities. These additional activities were additional to the career adviser role, diluting it into a more generic role but retaining a career advice focus. These practitioners identified themselves as career advisers, predominantly as the 'career' was reflected in their job titles.

4.6.3 Perceptions of other parts of the sector

Study participants considered that the concept of professional identity within the career context varied across the sector. Overall there was little knowledge about other specialist roles within the career sector. Although some had worked in a variety of sectors, for example young people, adult and higher education, these represented a minority. The majority were more likely to work with the same client group and see themselves as an occupational specialist for this group. When asked within the interviews if they felt parts of the sector were perceived as more

professional than others, all identified sectors other than their own. Overall most considered the Higher Education sector and those working in Universities to be the most professionalised. The perceived reasons for this included: their strong professional association (AGCAS), investment in continuing professional development, higher-level qualifications and higher salaries.

I think working in higher education there is more of an identity because I think AGCAS has been very successful in trying to promote that and represent the body of careers advisers in higher education. I think they have done it quite well over the years and so they represent themselves to you know, whoever employers, government, whatever [university careers adviser, interview]

Then you have people in higher education institutions who have done a masters in guidance; they are really knowledgeable and you know they have got that professional status [head of careers, FE/HE specialist college, interview]

I have a friend who is a careers adviser at XXXXX University and I would say she definitely has a professional identity. I have my own level in my head but I feel as a personal adviser for Connexions my professional identity is vague [personal adviser A, Connexions, interview]

Again within this the issue of specialism was raised. Those who saw practitioners as a specialist within a field such as working with graduates, adults or in research perceived them as having a more firmly established professional identity. Those who worked within a higher education context did acknowledge having a more established professional identity; however, this was balanced with a perception of being considered a lesser professional than other university roles such as lecturers/academics.

4.6.4 Defining the career practitioners' professional identity

To support interview and narrative respondents to reflect on the concept of professional identity a definition was provided:

The relatively stable and enduring constellation of attributes, beliefs values, motives and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role (Ibarra, 1999).

A number of definitions are available; this one was selected, as it was relatively broad and focused on components of identity that were thought to be meaningful to

respondents. This approach was adopted to assess whether a core set of professional characteristics could be defined. These would help to establish if a collective view could be adopted in defining the components of the careers practitioners' professional identity. All agreed that the definition was helpful in offering a framework to consider the attributes, beliefs, values, motives and experiences which they considered as constant for the career practitioner. One respondent felt that 'knowledge' was an omission and should also be included within the list.

The majority of the respondents used the definition to present what they perceived were core characteristics reflecting what they felt were common amongst all career practitioners. These were based on perceptions of themselves and their observations of their colleagues.

I believe that practitioners should have the values and beliefs to want to help others and get involved with activities in order to promote this. I believe that practitioners should all be motivated into wanting to improve and offer the best service they can [careers adviser C, FE, narrative]

The responses provided by the respondents were collated and coded. The range of characteristics presented tended to fall in to five categories: client focus, ethics, professional attributes, personal attributes and knowledge (see Table 4.5 below).

Client focus	Ethical practice	Professional attributes	Personal attributes	Specialist knowledge
Not treating everyone the same x2	Respecting individual differences	Develop own practice	Reliable	Understanding of the labour market
Respecting that people have different needs	Values driven	Ongoing training	Flexible	Theory that goes into work
Aspirational for client	Fair and open minded	Stay on top of the game	Interested	Knowledge of information
A fundamental belief in the ability of people	Impartial x3	Not becoming complacent	Adaptable x2	Knowledge of the labour market
Reach their potential	Recognizing own prejudice x2	Motivated in the work	Inquisitive	Knowledge of LMI
Better themselves	Acceptance	Committed to improving the quality of the practice	Good team worker	Knowledge of theory
Need to see things from the other perspective x2	Confidentiality	Strong role model for client and other professionals	Resourceful	
Inspire people to do things	Realistic	Work with a diverse	Ability to listen x2	

themselves		range of clients with different backgrounds x2		
Work out what is the best thing for the student/client x2	Non-judgmental x3	Prioritise time	Encourage	
Putting the client first x2	Altruistic service	Professional expertise	Inspire x2	
Client autonomy	Have a positive influence on those you work with	Motivated to want to improve and offer the best service	Empathising	
Value for the individual Support people to achieve a positive and desired outcome	Equality of opportunity A belief in the process	Improve knowledge	Helping, caring personality	
Guide the client	Honesty	Gain experience to improve knowledge	Self-respect	
Client in control of the process	Transparency		Approachable	
Helping clients find their own meaning in life			Accessible	
Reach their own goal			Measured approach	
An interest in people and their lives			Communicate effectively	
			Integrity	
			Facilitator	
			Helping x2	
			Counsellor	
			Work well with a wide range of people	

N.B. If identified more than once a number is attached to identify frequency

Table 4.5 Analysis of professional identity characteristics

These domains were defined through reflection on components of the ‘professional’ as identified within the review of the literature, and included Eraut (1994) and Evetts (1999) for example. Personal attributes defined the type of person and the skills required to be a career practitioner. The characteristics for client focus addressed how participants related their role to the people they worked with. The ethical framework that underpins professional career practice is very evident in the responses. In relation to the professional attributes there appeared to be a clear sense of a definition of the professional. The interesting element of this is the responses around knowledge which was not originally included in the definition offered, yet a number of responses would support its inclusion. The characteristics identified transcended work environments, initial training or occupational specialism and were applicable throughout the sector.

Although participants struggled to define professional identity as a concept, they were able to describe the characteristics that should be identifiable to a career practitioner. The dominant domains focus on the client and the personal attributes of the practitioner, thus defining the ideological relationship between practitioner and client.

They've got an inner confidence in their own ability and a belief in what they are doing and a belief in the importance of what we are trying to do and that sort of inherent need or want to help people [personal adviser A, Connexions, interview]

This relationship is encompassed within the ethical framework, which defines how the practitioner works with the client.

I think you also need to demonstrate the ethics around working with individuals and the importance of being impartial, recognising your own prejudices and potential for that within [university careers adviser, interview]

I have also found my professional code of ethical practice rather helpful. It has given me a framework to work to and has helped me to justify my approaches [curriculum adviser, Connexions, narrative]

Client focus and personal attributes are then underpinned by professional attributes, which define how the practitioner will ensure the viability and efficacy of the client and ethical domains.

I came to the profession because I wanted to make a positive difference to young people's lives. I could imagine that this is quite a strong driver for many who come into career guidance. It was only through professional training and development however; that I came to understand that helping wasn't about telling or showing what is right but rather liberating people to find the answers for themselves [curriculum adviser, Connexions, narrative]

These three domains are inextricably related and for many participants their professional identity was totally located around their work with the client and providing quality client focused services.

I am primarily a careers adviser. I use knowledge of my professional skills, knowledge and attitudes to influence the practice of others and in so doing; improve the service to young people [curriculum adviser, Connexions, survey]

The emphasis on the importance of the client provides an area of interest as it centres the practitioner very much as having a symbiotic relationship with the client in that they can only define themselves within the context of that one to one relationship. Within the survey 100% (combined very important/important) identified postgraduate awards as enhancing the quality of service for clients across the sector. 94% (combined very important/important) selected improving practice with clients as a personal benefit for undertaking the postgraduate programme. The findings would suggest that the client relationship would appear to be of fundamental importance for participants and as such is defined through ethics and professional attitudes. Together these elements would appear to play an important role in providing a common denominator for practitioners. For many, they were able to present a shared professional identity underpinned by a shared common set of beliefs concerning how they collectively delivered careers services regardless of the context in which they are located.

4.6.5 Contribution of postgraduate CPD to professional identity

The extent to which respondents subscribed to having a professional identity varied. As previously indicated some had a clear sense of who they were and others struggled with the concept of professional identity and how it applied to them. This may have been as a consequence of not understanding the terminology. Participants identified a wide range of factors which were perceived to generally contribute to the formation of professional identity including: professional association registration, networks, structured degree level qualifications, theoretical knowledge base, code of practice, commensurate levels of pay, respect and societal recognition. These were helpful to explore when reflecting on the conceptual framework in that they were able to populate the concept of professional identity more fully and specifically contribute to understanding the complex interrelationship that exists between practitioners and their professional identity.

Often, when I am undertaking IAG interviews people will assert, 'Ooh no I couldn't do that. You have to be clever and go to university to

be...’ But at the same time they might say, ‘How did you get your job? I’d like a job like yours.’ So it seems that there isn’t the same kind of understanding of Careers Guidance as a profession and sometimes there is an attitude of ‘anyone could do that’, which is compounded by the different entry routes to the profession via different types of qualifications [careers and higher education adviser, FE, narrative]

The ability to define one’s professional identity was constructed within an understanding of the perceived factors which contributed to formation, combined with a range of external variables including: length of time as a career adviser, range of experience with different client groups, impacts of government policy, previous jobs, qualification attainment level, salary, professional qualification (NVQ vs. QCG), work environment, specialism and length of contract. Consequently, study participants tended to locate their professional identity on a continuum, with a number of variables influencing positioning.

I find my professional identity at times very difficult as I am temporary staff and I am quite new and young in the profession [careers adviser C, FE narrative]

Some participants identified themselves as having a strong professional identity. This was often related to extensive experience, with a range of client groups and robust initial training such as QCG or the NVQ with theory provided by a university.

Yes, I consider my professional identity as someone who is able to work effectively with young people as an advisor, supporter and advocator [careers adviser B, FE, narrative]

Others felt demoralised that they were no longer able to fulfil the role as they lacked the tools required to be effective. Their professional identity, they felt, had been compromised by changes in government policy and particularly the contractual requirements of service provision.

I don’t feel my professional identity has changed I feel very strongly about that. I actually can’t fulfil it anymore, which is a different thing. I have an understanding of what a careers adviser should be and what I want it to be and I am not it anymore [adult careers adviser C, interview]

Others identified that their professional identity was in the process of transforming and that the postgraduate programme was a contributor to this.

I am sort of in the process of metamorphosing into a new professional identity. I think that I did have one before and I probably lost it as a practitioner but I am regaining a new one [adult careers adviser A, interview]

For some, having a professional identity was important; for others, they did not feel it mattered a great deal. This latter view often reflected those who had a number of previous careers and this was the current one. The majority of career practitioners have joined the profession 'by accident' often after a number of different occupations. One respondent suggested 'No one goes to university planning to be a careers adviser.' For those who felt professional identity was important it was perceived as both reflecting their pride in their job, but also how they aligned themselves professionally.

Conversely some participants did not perceive themselves in a traditional career guidance role and consequently found the professional identity discussion and the professionalisation agenda quite disturbing.

I think that is the problem I have with the whole professional identity around guidance. I think the concern I have is that it will be too narrow to take into account all the people that do do advice and guidance work as a major part of their job that do not fit into a specific category and I think that is the issue, you know. Guidance work is a very broad church [education adviser, HE, interview]

This in many ways summarises the key debate about career guidance as a profession; there are many people involved who are passionate about what they do, but do not define themselves by it.

The role of networks was identified as important in relation to professional identity formation. But the networks were self-selecting communities of practice and reflected groups of 'like-minded' individuals rather than those allied to work environment or professional associations. Individuals chose their networks to reflect those who approached practice and professional development in a similar way, such

as engagement in research for example. In addition they often sought individuals from outside their sector and in particular did not see their immediate work colleagues as their community of practice. They were often critical of work colleagues and did not see them as either professionals or having a professional identity.

(Researcher) Do you think that career guidance practitioners have a professional identity?

No. Categorically, I can just say no. No. I can explain why [Researcher - Please do]. I do think that this whole competency-based route and the diversity has allowed, talking about the adult sector, I can't comment on the young people's service at all. But the way that we have gone as an adult service basically every Tom, Dick and Harry can do it rather can do excuse me, piss poor and call themselves a careers adviser and not even, you know, and they will be, they will be working as a professional adviser in a professional way and have no concept of theory and no grounding in what they are doing or understanding [adult careers adviser C, interview]

Guidance is a profession but not all practitioners are currently operating at a professional level [specialist careers adviser, survey]

Therefore opportunities to engage with practitioners from across the sector were important, as were the opportunities to select and form one's own community of practice rather than utilising those already constructed. This presents an interesting debate. Earlier the findings identified a somewhat ambivalent relationship with professional associations, yet they are still perceived as having a role in contributing to professional identity formation. This varied discourse may be as a result of a lack of strong leadership from the (many) professional associations.

Engagement with the postgraduate programme contributed to some practitioners regaining their professional identity or defining themselves as a professional as a result of their study. They felt the programme distanced them from the basic level of training and qualification. This separation allowed a differentiation between practice which was mechanistic, and practice that was perceived as expert. In addition the programme offered the opportunity to learn and share with like-minded colleagues. A number of respondents identified frustrations in their work environment with

colleagues who were described as 'closed-off' or 'precious' about their work and not wanting to engage in professional development.

Without meaning to sound snobby, I found myself completing my NVQ in Advice and Guidance alongside other IAG workers, some of whom had only completed secondary level education...I didn't want to be perceived as a 'technician' and that is when I began to look into completing a higher education qualification in guidance [careers and higher adviser, FE, narrative]

Many perceived the postgraduate programme as providing them with the intellectual engagement that was lacking in their work environment and consequently separating them from work colleagues whom they perceived as not having a professional identity.

4.6.6 Benefits of postgraduate CPD

The narratives across all the datasets provided a rich source to assess the range of benefits in relation to the individual. Much of this related to increases in self-confidence, the development of a body of knowledge and their abilities in adapting their new knowledge to practice. For some these focused on the confidence to challenge their own practice and to review and reflect on what they did. Also, being empowered through having a greater understanding of the policy context in which they worked helped to build their confidence to both challenge the status quo and to raise their credibility with colleagues. The benefits were conceptualised by most in relation to how they worked with their clients and the nature of the client focus having primacy within their rationale for professional development.

For some however this implementation of practice provided an additional frustration, as there was a disjuncture between engagement with the programme and adaption to practice, as they felt unable to apply much of their learning. For some there was a perception that the work environment did not encourage or allow new approaches to practice to be implemented. This resulted in consideration of the relationship between study and work being redefined as an action research project, with the practitioner as the subject.

It has impacted in different ways. First of all my ability to work with clients. I have used different theories, I have not necessarily used them

very well because I am very alone doing it. I am unsupported and I don't have the opportunity to discuss with people [adult careers adviser C, interview]

For the majority the greatest impact on practice was the opportunity to have the time and space to reflect on their own practice.

I think all the reading and the research it has made me a very reflective practitioner, very, very reflective. I put things into practice and look at what I have done, I analyse the results. I try and pass things on to other people. I suppose it is almost like ongoing action research, it is an iterative process [adult careers adviser C, interview]

The opportunity to reflect on their practice and themselves, as professionals, appeared to have a profound impact. Reflection was identified in motivations but it appeared to be lower order than a primary motivation for study. Yet, this has consistently been an outcome for the majority of participants. Within career guidance practice reflection is often an assumed CPD activity. In reality it is often perceived as a luxury. The postgraduate programme allowed practitioners the luxury, space and structure in which to reflect on aspects of practice.

The idea is that really you are reflecting on what you are trying to do and how to do it....I suppose it is interesting to look at some of the newer theories ...we are becoming a more diverse student body here, you know with different cultures, different nationalities so it has been useful to revisit the traditional theories and also look at some of the newer one [university careers adviser, interview]

For some participants there was a strong sense of pride in their accomplishments and what they had so far achieved with their studies. These were perceived as having contributed to some practitioners' credibility with their peers and managers, enhanced their self-esteem and professional identity.

In contrast to the survey respondents, all those who contributed to the interviews were able to identify impacts on their practice. All felt that studying at a postgraduate level specifically had contributed to their practice as well as that of colleagues and in some cases the organisation. Interestingly, when questioned about benefits in the survey one participant had indicated there were no defined benefits

to practice, yet when asked in the interview they were able to identify some. This may have been due to the personal nature of the interview as opposed to the impersonal nature of the survey. Alternatively, they may have identified benefits later on as they progressed through the programme. On the whole it increased participants' confidence as practitioners and, as the majority perceived they had limited professional development since initial training, it was the first opportunity in many years to really reflect on their work through a number of lenses including policy, theory, reflection and observation of colleagues.

4.7 Conclusion

In summary the data showed participants perceived themselves to be professional within their work, but suggested that the occupation was not always seen as a profession due to lack of understanding of the role, status and heterogeneity of training and qualifications. Many of the respondents have a limited understanding and knowledge of other parts of the sector and assume that their own area is the least professionalised. Higher education was perceived as the exception to this, as the majority of the respondents identified this area as having a firmly established professional identity largely due to higher salary, higher qualifications and an active professional association, AGCAS.

Participants' experience of and relationship with CPD were varied; those working in educational institutions such as FE and HE had access to and engaged with a broader range of CPD opportunities. Many other participants perceived themselves as accessing training to ensure contract compliance. Continuing professional development (CPD) undertaken at postgraduate level was felt to have an impact on a number of levels including the participant themselves, their colleagues and their employing organisations. Employers were on the whole perceived to provide CPD only in relation to legislation and contract compliance. However, a significant percentage of the student body had received some financial support from their employer as a contribution to their studies.

There was also a lack of a clearly defined professional identity amongst many of the participants on the programme, but there was a clearer description of the characteristics which defined the career guidance practitioner. These led to defining the domains that classified professional identity: client focus, ethical practice, professional attitudes, personal attributes and specialist knowledge. The extent to which all practitioners perceive a professional identity is both varied and not fixed.

The findings were strongly supportive of the conceptual framework and have helped to shape the discussion further. There was a significant amount of synergy across the framework, and key concepts remained dominant such as definition of profession, CPD, benefits of postgraduate study and professional identity. These concepts have evolved from concepts in the theoretical framework, both in terms of generic literature and specific career guidance literature to become 'real' in terms of meaning to the study participants and interpretations of this by the researcher. Topics that were considered relevant within the literature review such as competence, professionalisation, professional association and community of practice, although still relevant, would appear to have less significance to the study participants. In contrast to this a number of thematic areas have taken on higher order relevance including: CPD, impacts on practice and generic vs. specialist roles. Knowledge has evolved from expert knowledge to a more encompassing body of knowledge incorporating theoretical, research, policy and broader knowledge of the profession. These concepts will be considered more fully in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 Discussion and analysis of findings

5.1 Introduction

This section presents the critical analysis and discussion arising from the findings in the previous chapter. It focuses on exploring the themes that have been identified guided by the conceptual framework. The chapter seeks to draw out and discuss the findings as they relate to the research question, examining the role of postgraduate CPD and its contribution to the professional identity of career practitioners. Throughout this section the relationship between the theoretical framework and the findings are examined. This supports an examination of how these concepts were considered and extended, using the evidence from the study, and connects theory with the narrative of the findings. It also considers the implications for the career profession in light of the current professionalisation agenda. The chapter concludes with an exploration of further research and consideration of opportunities to develop the study.

Hiebert (2009) argues that a hierarchical view of training is promoted within career guidance and that practitioners who have a masters degree are no more competent than those with lower level qualifications. He suggests that a masters degree is not required for the delivery of career work. This view is one that is divergent with much of the debate in England at the moment where recommendations by the Careers Profession Task Force (2010) are both driving forward the need for theory to be a core part of CPD and increasing initial training qualification requirements to level 7. Skills Development Scotland (SDS) (2012) has produced a qualifications and CPD framework. This supports differentiated qualifications for different roles, with postgraduate qualifications required for those performing career adviser activities. The SDS framework defines what qualifications are considered appropriate as professional development for progression to the various roles. These contrasting views suggest there is a lack of consensus within the career field internationally as to the level of qualification required to be effective as a professional career practitioner.

This case study presents the perceptions of a group of practitioners at an important time in the history of the occupation, where legislation is changing the statutory requirements of career provision for schools (Education Act, 2011), a national careers service has been launched in England (DBIS, 2011), the professional associations are aligning into one new association and new qualifications have been introduced (ICG, 2013b). All this is evolving against a back drop of extensive restructuring of the career workforce in the UK due to public sector austerity measures (Hooley and Watts, 2011). Many participants during this study were under threat of redundancy or significant changes to their work. This study therefore presents a unique opportunity to explore the spoken and lived experiences of career practitioners and their perceptions of themselves as professionals within a time of change and the influences on formation and maintenance of professional identity.

5.1.1 The study participants – a summary

The study benefited from attracting a broad representation of career practitioners working in a range of sectors across the UK. This helped in testing out if the themes identified were localised to an occupational group or a geographical area. Participants in the study were aged between 31 and 59, had worked on average within the sector for just over 11 years and they had had other jobs before coming into career work. The majority had undertaken work-based learning to achieve their 'professional' qualification and nearly 60% had a first degree. Although many in the study were practitioners, in that they worked directly with clients, a number had specialist roles included training, curriculum development and management responsibilities.

5.2 Motivations for postgraduate study

The practitioners in this study have all elected to invest money (both theirs and their employers'), time and resource in engaging in professional development that is accredited as a higher-level qualification. Although initial motivation for study significantly focused on career progression, as evidenced through the analysis of applications, as individuals progressed through their studies career progression became less important and personal benefits such as self-confidence and critical

thinking took precedence. This suggested that although students initially embark on a programme because they perceive it as contributing to and forwarding their career, the experience of engaging with learning at this level changes the motivation to more intrinsic personal benefits; self-confidence, self-esteem and academic skills such as research and critical thinking took on a higher priority for participants. Practice with clients and colleagues and contributing to a community of practice took on greater importance, thus reflecting more specifically what might be traditionally defined as professionalism.

The findings suggest that individuals make applications based on a range of motivations; these can be tentatively divided into four groupings, career progression, practice development, academic development and self-development. These represent the motivations most commonly articulated and suggest that motivations between application and completion of study remain constant but that they become reordered at different points in the academic career. Hence, career progression was most important prior to commencing the programme, yet while on programme personal development took precedence with career progression becoming reduced in importance. Motivations for engaging in study evolve from external outcomes such as career progression into benefits for the self in the form of confidence, self-esteem and self-motivation.

The findings suggest some coherence with previous studies explored (Feinstein, Anderson, Hammond, Jamieson and Woodley, 2007; Kember et al., 2008) in that they define intrinsic, extrinsic and career as the primary motivations. Arthur et al., (2006) identified motivation tending to fall into two categories personal interest and professional development which has some resonance here. Kember et al. (2008) suggest motivations are either intrinsic or extrinsic. This view is problematic as it presents these as an either/or choice, whereas for many potential students this case study suggests motivations may be a mixture of extrinsic and intrinsic. Within these existing studies there is little discussion as to changing motivations. This study suggests, for this group at least, that motivations are flexible with extrinsic evolving into intrinsic and that dominant motivation may be a dynamic.

This study suggests that motivations exist on a continuum and that, in support of Swain and Hammond (2011), they are related to life course context. As already discussed, many in the study were at risk or potential risk of losing their jobs. Therefore, engaging in a postgraduate qualification for some may have been a way not of directly seeking a new opportunity but demonstrating professionalism through seeking higher-level qualifications. Engagement in study potentially contributes to increases in individual capital in the form of what Swain and Hammond (2011) refer to as professional, personal and social capital. Individuals see engagement with and attainment of a higher qualification than that of their peers and managers as providing human capital that will enhance their employability, and consequently the continuum of motivations includes career.

Swain and Hammond (2011) define professional capital as skills that can be used in professional life. This would appear to be the dominant motivation in encouraging individuals to engage in higher level CPD. However, this becomes replaced by personal capital, 'attitudes, aspirations and dispositions affecting identity' (2011:595), as participants become emerged in their studies. Caldwell (2001) and Kell (2006) consider that masters level study meets the needs of practitioners who want to engage with their practice at a higher level through advancing their skills and academic knowledge. As with the Swain and Hammond (2011) study, participants gained personal capital: for many this was in the form of a professional identity, for others it was confidence in their enhanced knowledge levels when compared with colleagues and managers. These findings also support Kell (2006) who suggests that practitioners engaging in higher-level study are seeking a qualification which affords greater professional standing. The study acknowledges the influence of capital as defined by Bourdieu (1986) as participants initially actively seeking to acquire leverage, which they perceived, would enhance their career opportunities.

For many of the practitioners in the study, taking responsibility and owning their professional development was an important aspect of what the programme represented. Through this they sought autonomy in their professionalism as they

were able to exert agency over their CPD. Richardson (2004) argues that students integrate their academic experiences into their personal and professional identity, and as such evidence increased pride in their professional role and the contributions they make in the workplace. It could be argued that for these students taking ownership of this aspect of their professional life (their CPD) empowered them in having a greater influence and impact on other parts of their professional life.

5.2.1 Development of professional knowledge

A lack of knowledge in relation to theory was identified as an important motivator for study. Findings indicated that there was a gap in theoretical knowledge because many had limited opportunity to formally study theory within their initial training or had engaged in theory but had limited opportunities to refresh their knowledge since. A need to update theoretical knowledge would therefore lend itself to the selection of a university postgraduate qualification as an appropriate form of CPD. The nature of award bearing programmes and recognition for professional development re-emerge as dominant themes in the choice of CPD.

Eraut (1994) considers that willingness to engage in theory is dependent on the individual, their work context and how they are introduced to knowledge and its links to their professional concerns. This introduction to knowledge is an important element within this study. The findings suggest that those who engaged with knowledge as part of their professional initial training appear to have a different relationship to theory than those who have had no professional engagement with the theoretical elements of their professional practice. For some in the study they were not aware that there was a theoretical basis for their work.

Kidd, Killeen, Jarvis and Offer (1997) suggest that there is a variation in perceived benefits of theoretical knowledge in relation to career guidance practice. For those who lacked theory there had been a keen sense of knowing something was missing from their professional practice, and those who perceived themselves as professional practitioners sought out opportunities to address this issue. Many of the study participants identified colleagues as having a lack of interest in CPD, which

might be due to limited exposure to theory. Eraut (1994) and Ibarra (1999) both identify models as important in encouraging the behaviour of others. If the majority of practitioners in the workplace have had limited engagement with the theoretical underpinnings of practice, then it might appear unusual for one to show an interest. The relationship with theory potentially presents a fundamental criterion on which to build career guidance as a profession. This is recognised by those in the study and also increasingly by the sector as the introduction of the new qualifications includes career theory as a core requirement.

The development of professional knowledge at level 7 was perceived by participants to offer benefits not just to themselves, but also to their organisation and to the career guidance sector more generally. The study participants articulated a strong affinity to the sector with 95% considering that postgraduate study was very important/important to professionalising the sector. It was perceived as a mechanism to increase the credibility of career guidance practitioners and the status of career guidance more generically, as has been the case with nursing and other public sector professions engaged in a professionalisation project (Hodkinson, 1995).

The study suggests that a lack of coherent training and qualifications within career guidance has contributed to an inconsistency in a theoretical body of knowledge in practice. It could be argued that this has resulted in a workforce that has a differentiated knowledge base, thus undermining the claim to being a professional occupation. Kidd et al. (1994) suggest that long service within the occupation does not lead to a greater recognition of the relevance of theory. Yet within this case study that would not appear to be the case. The need to have a better understanding of theory has provided a significant driver to those who value theory and recognise its role within practice and has influenced the selection of postgraduate study as a professional development activity. However when Kidd et al. (1994) conducted their research in the early 1990s there was a consistent training programme and the majority of public sector career advisers would have engaged in this. This changed with the introduction of the work based learning qualifications

where theory was no longer a core element. More recently Athanasou (2012) conducted a survey of career development practitioners in Australia where knowledge of career development theory has been defined as a core competency. Within his survey, knowledge of career development theory was identified as both relevant and needed within professional practice. However, it was only listed third in the priority of professional development needs after labour market and information and resource management. This suggests that although theory is recognised as important for practice, not all practitioners view it in the same way.

5.3 Perceptions of CPD

Motivation for a postgraduate qualification is varied and individuals have a raft of reasons for wanting to engage in study at this level. Douglas (2004) argues that individuals should own their CPD, as in this way they align themselves with their profession and are not dependent on development linked to employers' business objectives. Views of what constituted professional development tended to define CPD as a set of activities within a process, most commonly identified as training. There was, however, a belief in the importance of CPD as a fundamental component of what was perceived of as being a 'professional'. This led to frustrations as to what appeared to be the over-emphasis within the workplace on what the researcher has defined as 'operational CPD' and less focus on 'formal CPD' which was considered as being directly related to professional practice. These types of CPD all tended to be differently valued suggesting that the more control participants had in selecting and directing the CPD the more it was valued. Figure 5.1 below presents the types of CPD identified and the value placed by study respondents related to their autonomy in engaging with the type of CPD.

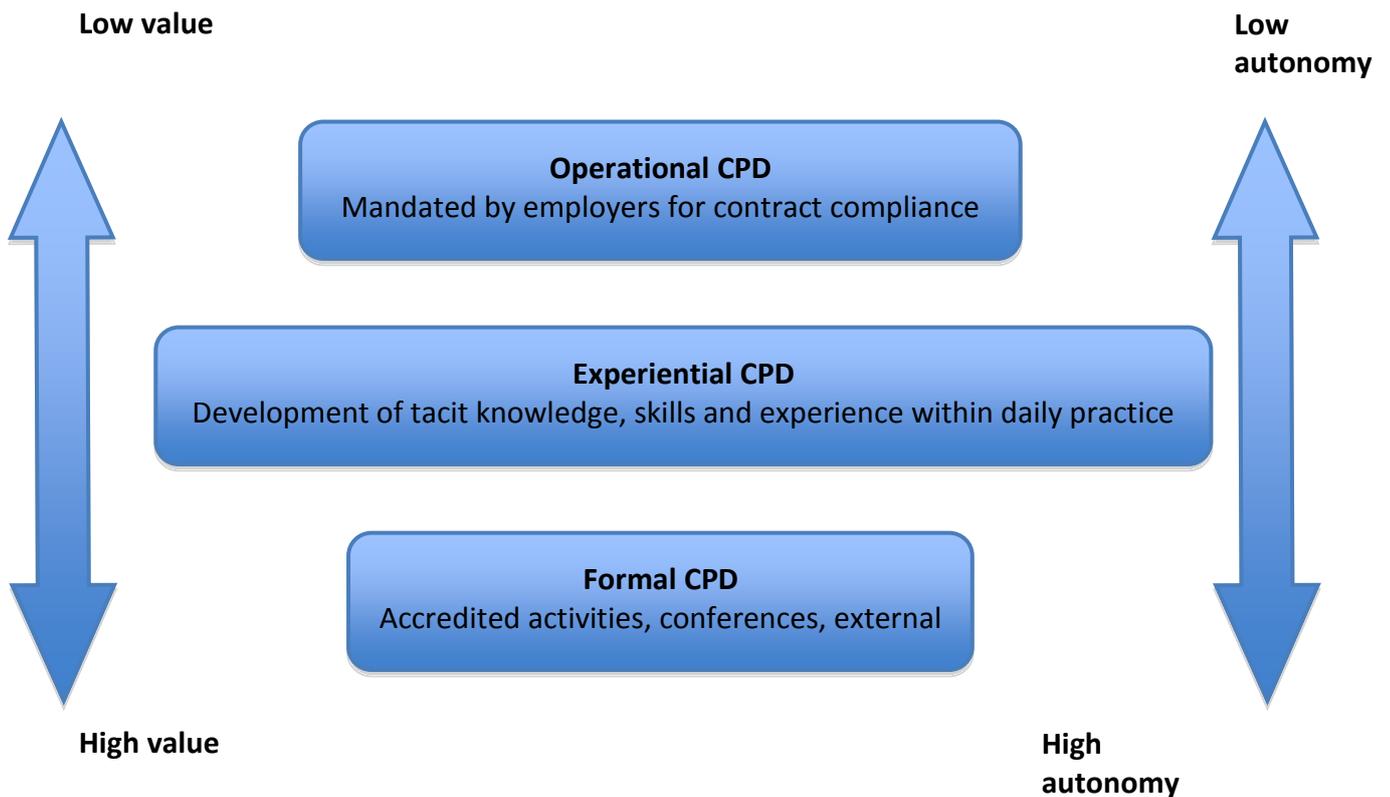


Figure 5.1 Typology of CPD work

Within this typology those activities mandated by employers were defined as operational CPD. All participants perceived these as being compulsory; as the employer defined them they tended to undervalue them. Operational CPD was perceived as something that had to be done to meet organisational need rather than something which enhanced individual professional practice. Training and CPD were generally used as interchangeable terms with little or no distinction as to other types of CPD. The majority of examples offered by participants generally reflected training activities organised and provided by the employer.

The question in relation to these activities concerned the extent to which they were considered CPD. Madden and Mitchell (1993) consider CPD to include maintenance and enhancement of knowledge, expertise, and competence throughout the career. Evetts (1999) considers it as interchangeable with lifelong learning, but all referred to CPD as a planned activity. The argument therefore focuses on ownership of planning. All the activities identified in operational CPD were planned by the

employer and were linked to personal planning and development schemes for the organisation. The staff member had little autonomy within this context and was required to undertake the prescribed activities, possibly even contractually. The findings suggest that the activities within this category were not recognised by participants in the study as professional development in support of practice, but were identified as CPD activities. The issue of value with these activities may be located within their prescription, however; many participants suggested that it was the definition of these by the organisation as CPD which was the problem. Lewin and Colley (2011) identified disparity of training within Connexions companies, and much of what was considered CPD addressed contractual and legislative requirements and particularly topics identified as CPD omissions in the Skills Commission Inquiry (2008). This differentiation would support Douglas (2004) who clearly separates out work based learning and CPD; operational CPD would fit within the work based learning category.

The benefits of mandatory CPD are questioned by Watkins (1999) and Mulvey (2004). For some of the participants these activities were seen to de-professionalise them and one study participant described it as 'infantilising' and 'patronising'. However, many of the activities identified were linked to legal requirements and contract compliance. Although these may not be considered as important to the participant, many of these activities contribute to professional practice, especially activities around legislation and safeguarding. The issue may in fact be more around how these activities are presented, in that the links to professional practice are not explicitly made for the participants. The nature of what is offered to practitioners is based on recall and perception and is also dependent on the nature and commitment of their employing organisation to professional development.

The findings suggest that experiential CPD was generally perceived as an implicit part of practice, whereby knowledge and skills were developed tacitly to enhance practice. Alternatively they were developed explicitly with participants identifying a development need and seeking internal support to achieve this, for example working with a particular client group. Eraut (1994) considers this type of professional

development the norm as practitioners continually learn throughout their working life. He considers this as 'case-specific' learning that contributes to generalised professional knowledge. However, Eraut (1994) also considers this form of development as work-based learning, but perceives the benefits and differentiates this differently to Douglas (2004). The Eraut definition of work-based learning focuses on the situational and the context of where the learning takes place as opposed to what he considers as continuing professional education (CPE) which encompasses activities defined here as formal CPD.

Experiential CPD was recognised and acknowledged by participants, but the value to practice was somewhat underrated and in many ways taken for granted. It tended to be seen as a normal activity which enhances practice and supports the practitioner to undertake their role, but it was not consciously recognised as contributing to developing individual professional practice.

Experiential CPD could be considered as contributing to ensuring competence; as such it may also be allied to observation of practice and work based assessments. References to competence throughout the study were minimal and appeared to be aligned with initial training rather than ongoing ability to undertake a role. This view is likely to be influenced by the nature of accreditation for many of the participants who engaged with a work based competence form of assessment. Eraut (1994) and Fournier (1999) consider competence in relation to accountability and control of professional status. For career workers the requirement for a professional qualification has been somewhat ambiguous (Careers Profession Task Force, 2010). As such it is acknowledged that practitioners may hold a qualification in advice and guidance, but equally may not (Harrison et al., 2001). Some participants suggested that their life and work experience was of greater value to their practice than specified qualifications.

The findings suggested that few practitioners plan to become a career practitioner and many fall into it or arrive as part of a career change. The lack of traditional

formal entry routes, qualifications, standards and CPD often undermines the importance and relevance of formalised competence systems within the sector. As such, 'experiential CPD' fulfils a role in ensuring that practice is evolving to meet the present and future needs of clients. Competence is therefore constructed implicitly within developing practice but is assessed explicitly as a contractual compliance in some sectors such as the National Careers Service. This contractual requirement, rather than reinforcing the value of competence, undermines it as a managerial device in the view of some commentators (Evetts, 1999).

A potential issue around trust was identified in the findings. There was a question raised as to the extent to which participants trusted their employer to support them in developing the skills and knowledge they perceived were needed to be effective in their job. This appears to confirm Shaw and Green's (1999) viewpoint in that it reflects an investment in lifelong learning, which contributes to personal fulfilment. Most study participants identified that their employers did not supply the development they felt they needed or support them in accessing it. However, for many they were financially supported to take the postgraduate award. The employer contributions therefore support Quinn et al. (1996) who promote the nurturing of professionals, and anticipate that this investment will contribute to a greater impact for the organisation. However, the dominant contribution to CPD from employers are largely within functional and systems-based knowledge. Consequently this dominance overshadows, from the participant perspective, other employer contributions. Eraut (1994) is critical of employers' focus on promotion of new knowledge from outside rather than the development and enhancement of existing knowledge. Both Eraut (1994) and Quinn et al. (1996) promote investment in professional staff to support development of practice and knowledge and create highly autonomous professionals.

Formal or proper CPD was the phrase most commonly adopted by participants to describe what they perceived as supporting the development of professional practice. How this was achieved was not well articulated. CPD tended to be defined as 'proper' or not. This 'proper' CPD was classified within the typology as formal CPD

and tended to be defined as being delivered by an external agent and/or being award bearing. The criteria tended to be perceived as providing professional development that had wider recognition and transferability outside of the employing organisation. Formal CPD was generally perceived as being of greater value to the individual and to professional career development. It is of course recognised that all participants were engaged in a programme of this type and therefore are more likely to value it. The interesting point is the extent to which other forms of CPD are considered of lesser value. Formal CPD therefore was perceived as having capital as defined by Swain and Hammond (2011).

For the study participants award bearing programmes and training provided by external providers (i.e. not their employer) were perceived as having greater kudos. This was perceived to represent an investment in staff, in that the employer was funding this directly as opposed to it being delivered by an internal training team. The emphasis on the external may represent a lack of credibility in internal provision or just over-familiarity with internal providers. Much of the internal provision was identified as being process focused and as such devoid of theoretical underpinnings. External provision was perceived as more expensive, having a wider recognition and therefore of greater value. Participants perceived formal CPD as having a specialist and professional focus and concentrating on professional practice which enhanced work with clients. Arthur et al. (2006) suggest the benefits of award bearing programmes for CPD as offering an explicit focus on the interface of theory and practice. The intellectual engagement (Caldwell, 2001) that qualifications of this nature offer also provides a forum for practitioners to reflect on their practice and critically assess their existing skills and knowledge.

Award bearing CPD is particularly identified within the findings as being able to contribute to the professionalisation of the sector. The development of professional knowledge at level 7 was perceived by participants to offer benefits not just to themselves, but also to their organisation and to the career guidance sector more generally. The survey identified that 95% of the respondents felt that postgraduate

study was very important to professionalising the sector. This was seen to increase the credibility of career guidance practitioners and the status of career guidance more generically.

The study supports the view that CPD is a complex activity and one that is not clearly defined or understood (Friedman and Philips, 2004; Peel, 2005). The differentiation between what may be considered as CPD as opposed to work-based learning (Douglas, 2004) reflects the views of the participants. CPD should support development of professional practice rather than a common approach in support for achieving business outcomes. This study suggests there is a limited discourse within the sector addressing CPD, resulting in a lack of clarity as to definition, purpose and a restriction as to the broad extent of activities which could be considered. The career sector needs within the professionalisation agenda to provide an opportunity for debate as to the nature of CPD, differentiation and particularly the benefits of experiential learning. CPD should not be limited to just what has been defined as operational and formalised activities. It should be a rich, creative activity allowing individuals to reflect on the benefits of various approaches and encouraging a greater value within all of these. Study participants presented continuing professional development as a key determinant of being a professional and as central to professional identity. This aligns with Mulvey's (2011b) depiction of CPD as existential in that it is a way of being a professional. It also reinforces the divide between practitioners who actively engage in CPD and who can be considered as professionals, as opposed to those who don't, who may be defined within a 'technical' role.

5.4 Professional Identity

5.4.1 The career practitioner as a professional

Many of the participants were still very much attuned to considering the elite professions as the accepted definition of the professional. As such they were unable to consider themselves as 'professionals' within this traditional context. They did see professional parity with other occupations such as teaching and social work. The public sector professions and those often classified as 'new professions' offered a

more acceptable and comfortable comparator, particularly as they perceived their role as being altruistic in nature and purposeful in serving the public need (Hodkinson, 1995). The views of the study participants closely mirror those of Furbish and Ker (2002); McMahon (2004) and Douglas (2010; 2011) where elements of the profession may be in place such as ethical practice and initial training. However, the lack of standardisation and external recognition challenges the perception of career guidance as a recognised profession.

A primary aim of this research was to assess how postgraduate level CPD contributed to practitioners' professional identity. This required consideration as to defining professional identity within the career workforce context. Practitioners, when asked to define their professional identity, often struggled. In view of the variation of definition (Beijaard et al., 2004) and the challenge in articulating expertise and specialism (Mellin, 2011), this may not be surprising.

The research addressed professional identity with respondents from two perspectives, their personal perspective as to their own professional identity and that of career practitioners more generally. In relation to their personal professional identity the key determinant focused around job title and role. When exploring the concept more broadly for the workforce the analysis of professional identity characteristics was identified resulting in a classification defining five broad domains, client focus, ethical practice, professional attributes, personal attributes and specialist knowledge.

5.4.2 Individual professional identity

When asked to define their professional identity the majority of participants located their response within their job role. These were categorised as 'I am a career adviser.', 'It depends on who I am talking to.', and 'I have lots of roles.' These three descriptors offered an interesting exploration as to how the study participants internalised who they were, without being able to fully externalise this to others. Only a small minority felt comfortable in articulating what they did. This small group tended to have a well-defined professional identity and sense of who they were and

what they did. The inability to effectively articulate a role is recognised by Souhami (2007) and Mellin et al. (2011) who identified the inability to express specialist expertise within occupations such as youth justice and counselling. This would also appear to be a key issue for the career sector.

When exploring the Beijaard et al. (2004) approach to professional identity there is resonance within the findings for descriptions of individual professional identity. Recognition and being valued by others represented a recurring theme throughout much of the data. How their peers, allied professionals, managers, clients and society at large perceived practitioners was of great importance to them. The third element identified by Beijaard et al. (2004) focused on perceptions of others and the accepted images in society of what the professional role involves. For many participants there was the fundamental belief that the public at large has little understanding of the career adviser role. In addition, with the diversification of the workforce, practitioners often felt that there was a general belief that it was a role anyone can do. This has been a recurring theme noted by Douglas (2009a).

People didn't know what it [career practitioner] meant... I tell people I am a careers practitioners and (laughs) I've lost them, you know (Douglas, 2009b:11)

For some this was compounded by a belief that not only the general public and some clients lacked an understanding of the role, but that many peers within peripheral roles did as well. For many participants this enhanced a sense of isolation and a lack of value, in what they felt was an important job. A concern here lies in the lack of confidence presented by participants in their ability to present their occupation in a meaningful and accessible way. The impact of government policy in particular had contributed significantly to this feeling. The extent to which the careers service has been manipulated in response to changing government agendas has resulted in key changes of focus, clients and practice as evidenced by Lawrence (1992), Peck (2004), Artaraz, (2006), Colley et al. (2010), Douglas (2009a, 2011) and Hooley and Watts (2011). With every change comes a rebranding, and with each rebranding and refocus the public's perception of career work changes and potentially challenges the professional identity of practitioners. Brown (1997) suggests that in times of

rapid change professional identity frames the way individuals are able to cope with stress at work. It is important to have a sense of what contributes to the formation of the career practitioner's professional identity and the role that postgraduate CPD may contribute to this.

It is also worth considering the impact of policy drivers that have sought to replace the career profession with more generic roles: the personal adviser in the Connexions service for young people is a pertinent example. These changes have had an impact on how the participants viewed themselves and their profession (Artaraz, 2006; Colley, 2009). According to Beijaard et al. (2004) the concept of self has an impact on how individuals develop and the nature of their practice. This element within their definition focuses on the personal and individual internalisation of the professional role and how it relates to self. The various large-scale policy realignments, from education and employment to social inclusion and progression, have changed the self-concept of the career workforce and how they view themselves (Artaraz, 2006; Colley et al., 2010). For many participants, regardless of their initial training route, the lack of consistent training, body of knowledge and recognised qualifications for the sector has created ambiguity. McCarthy (2004) suggests training has a dominant effect on the development of professional identity. This ambiguity has particularly challenged the professional status of those who have invested in postgraduate qualifications and professional development.

Macdonald (1995) discusses the notion of jurisdiction in professional work and being able to define it:

The content of the professional work, the control of that work, differentiation in types of work and the jurisdiction that the profession attempts to claim for its work is at the heart of the matter and the raw material of theory. But in addition, the quality that characterises professional work (and here we get back to the topic of knowledge) is abstraction (Macdonald, 1995:163)

Macdonald claims this abstraction in relation to theory is what differentiates specialisms from inter-professionalism, or what is specifically unique to an

occupational area. This is important as this is at the core of the issues for career guidance. The findings contend that the career guidance profession struggles to differentiate clearly and articulate what it does that would be defined as 'professional'.

The issue of nomenclature within the findings appeared to have a number of important roles; an articulation of the occupational activity, identification of area of specialism and differentiation between various roles and activities within career work. The lack of clarity or imposed changing of job titles was a key issue for many in this study as this directly contributes to how people both perceive and present themselves to others. A key identification in the findings was to what constituted a 'professional' centred on differentiation between generalist and specialist practice. This was identified by a number of participants, specifically those working with young people in Connexions and those providing a broader range of educational guidance provision.

This issue of specialism supported by a body of theoretical knowledge was perceived to define someone as an expert within their field, for example career guidance. But more than this, study participants sub-divided this definitional issue into how it applied to young people, adults and higher education. It could be argued that the nature of the individual's identity is strongly influenced by their area of specialism i.e. adult, young person, graduates (Mellin et al., 2010) and this not only defines who they are, but also their role and how confident they feel articulating this to others. Those working within educational institutions felt more confident about their role and what they did and this was often linked to their job title. Ironically, they were often the ones who had the most varied roles to deliver. Many of the FE participants had a job title which was not perceived as generic but was designated as a career expert with additional responsibilities. Thus, it suggests the converse of the more familiar embedded role, where career activities are integrated within existing job roles (Harrison et al., 2001; Neary and Jackson, 2010).

The focus on the client groups that the practitioner worked with could be perceived to confirm the fragmentation within the sector. It suggests that the career sector is not an occupational group with a shared identity, but a group of practitioners working under an umbrella job title. It potentially points to a lack of confidence in the singularity of 'career adviser' as nomenclature and the requirement for a prefix that identifies the client group that the practitioner works with. Yet at the same time participants presented a sense of definition by using the term career adviser in their job title. The findings suggested there was a perception that those who had generic terms such as 'personal adviser' or 'IAG worker' as their job title considered themselves a lesser professional than those who had 'career' in their job title. This would imply that the term career adviser provides a job title that is recognisable, but practitioners want to have their specialist area also acknowledged.

The recognition of 'careers' as specialist knowledge confirms Artavaz's (2006) findings in part, in that the study participants considered themselves as having a recognised body of theoretical knowledge. However, it partially challenges the belief that the ethos of the organisation is less relevant. Although the environment does not define the practitioner *per se*, the client group would appear to do so. This also challenges Beijaard et al. (2004) who suggest that individuals often locate their identity in relation to the status of their discipline, so if they perceive low status they locate their professional identity within their generic role. Colley et al. (2010) present in their research a lack of clarity as to the role of the personal adviser, specifically around delivery of brokering services to young people. If there is a fragile professional identity then the strain potentially increases significantly and many practitioners choose to leave (Colley, 2009).

5.4.3 Professional identity of the career practitioner

The findings suggest that the case study participants generally struggled to define their own professional identity to any great degree in the survey and the interviews; they were however able to consider it within the abstract. When asked to define what might constitute the professional identity of career practitioners using the Ibarra (1999) definition, practitioners felt much more confident. The analysis of the

characteristics was classified into five domains (see Figure 5.2)



Figure 5.2 Classification of professional identity characteristics

The model suggests that the study participants perceived these domains as the key elements that define the career practitioner's professional identity. It also reflects a model of professional practice and the ethical framework where the client lies at the centre of practice. These findings reinforce those of Reid (2007) who describes the meeting of client need as the focus of the career practitioner's working life. A commitment to client focus was implicit at all levels of the data, and perceived as being a rationale for and an outcome of engaging with postgraduate study.

For many, client focus was synonymous with their need for professional development and inextricable from their practice and how they perceived

themselves (Neary and Hutchinson, 2009). The importance of ethics was fundamental and defined practitioners' professionalism and sense of self.

Throughout the findings participants included references to ethics and ethical approaches when discussing their roles. This constant was a common element connecting participants across all sectors, all training, all qualification levels and all employment settings. All subscribe to an ethical framework either implicitly or explicitly in their practice, and this is the one factor that can be described by all as relevant to how they see themselves collectively as part of a professional cohort. This case study suggests this, more than anything else, contributes to defining the career guidance practitioners' professional identity.

This collective model, however, has less resonance with the Beijaard et al. (2004) approach, which defines professional identity through image of self, the occupational role and expectations of others. It could be suggested that this collective model offers an aspirational and idealised representation of the professional career practitioner and that participants found it easier to espouse this vision of practitioners. Professional attributes, personal attributes and specialist knowledge align with Eraut's (1994) perceptions and findings and the components that he defines as contributing to professional practice. This study locates ethics as central to all professional career practice and as such suggests the importance of ethics when trying to define the specialist nature of career work.

5.4.4 Factors contributing to the formation of professional identity

The findings present that for many participants the concept of professional identity was both challenging and opaque. The data collected presents the view of a broad range of practitioners and a continuum on which they define where they feel their professional identity sits. Factors which were perceived to contribute to the formation of professional identity were varied and included intrinsic factors such as values and ethics. For the group of participants within this study, their professional identity has developed over a period of time, and for some it was well established and always had been whilst for others it was in transition.

Factors identified as contributing to identity formation included the existence of networks, in particular opportunities to interact and communicate with like-minded people, and these were often self-selecting. The commitment to CPD was paramount, as was the desire to engage with practitioners from a wide professional milieu. Others focused on collective external devices such as professional association registration, standardised qualifications, respect, societal recognition and commensurate levels of salary. Many of these reflected the criteria defined by Beijaard et al. (2004) and generally reflect a common and shared professional experience supporting Evetts' (2003a) view of professional identity.

A major concern identified in the findings relating to the concept of professional identity and being a professional focused on financial recognition. Participants in the study represented practitioners working in many career guidance settings. Within each of the sectors there can be significant differentiation in pay. Adult career advisers are often perceived to be the lowest paid, as many are employed by the voluntary and community sector, while university career advisers are generally thought the highest paid. It could be argued that there is a contrast between qualifications and training for the different roles, and to some extent this can be upheld as all university career advisers will have a first degree. Increasingly many will have a qualification in career guidance which will have been awarded by a university as a result of the Harris report (DfEE, 2001). Evetts (2003b) examines the professionalisation of service workers such as nursing, midwifery, social work, librarians and the extent to which training and certification have contributed to their professionalisation. In relation to salaries she suggests that professionalisation brings a perception of an increased workload and responsibility but with little recognition either financially or from society. Career workers can easily be considered within this category.

The theoretical framework identified a range of variables and factors that can influence identity formation. Felstead et al. (2010) focus on employers promoting and creating a defined professional identity for their staff; this can be evidenced in

the construction of the personal adviser role within Connexions. Ibarra (1999) considers socialisation and role models as being key drivers. Training, expertise, qualifications and being seen and seeing oneself as qualified are considered by McCarthy (2004), Beijaard et al. (2004) and Mellin et al. (2011). CEDEFOP (2009) identified the following as contributing to professional identity: recognition in national systems of occupations, media coverage raising awareness of the occupational area, professional associations, academic training and specialist training. The findings reflected many of the factors identified above. This suggests that construction of professional identity in career work is similar to that of other occupational groups. However, the fragility of professional identity can also be linked to the factors identified by Beijaard et al. (2004), namely societal expectations and what the individual thinks is important about their work. These may be inter-related due to the inability of practitioners to articulate effectively what career work is, its potential impacts and its unique qualities.

5.4.5 Postgraduate CPD as a contributor to professional identity

The findings suggest that the case study participants generally perceived a significant enhancement in their professional identity through engagement with theory, empowerment, reflection, policy and academic study. The exceptions to this tended to have a strongly defined existing professional identity. Many claimed to previously having had a professional identity but had felt it was waning; others had a developing or embryonic professional identity which was becoming more fully formed through engagement in the programme. Study participants perceived professional identity being reinforced through engagement with professional development and investment in self and practice, which contributed to clarity of role and the parameters surrounding this.

Those in the study who worked in non-statutory educational institutions (FE and HE) predominantly had stronger professional identities than those working directly with young people or adults. For the latter two groups their practice has perhaps received greater intervention from government policy, although increasingly both FE and HE are undergoing similar experiences.

Douglas (2011) considers within her research practitioners whom she identifies as 'academic reflectors'. This group she presents as recognising the value of academic knowledge and reflection in relation to practice. This group use language to construct their professional identity and define it within the parameters of:

'academic knowledge, professional judgment and autonomy, social value and altruism, and ethical practice' (Douglas, 2011:168)

This definition provides strong congruence with the findings from the case study and reflects the outcomes and benefits of practitioners engaging in postgraduate level CPD.

The findings suggest engagement with postgraduate level study and particularly masters degrees produces many benefits for practitioners both intellectually and practically which contribute to establishing or maintaining their professional identity. Intellectually, engagement with this masters programme provided personal space for practitioners to critically engage with their practice, to review, reflect and redefine what they did and how they worked. Shaw and Green (1999:169) claim lifelong learning is about intellectual knowledge and not just about vocational skills and economic benefits. This reflects many of the research findings here where individuals' motivations for engagement have generally valued the intellectual elements more than the kudos of the academic qualification. The programme provided the opportunity to re-engage with the roots of what practice was perceived to be about. A participant stated, 'I think it has totally reignited my passion and enthusiasm for guidance', thus reinforcing their professional identity through realignment of practice with esoteric and theoretical debate, and supporting Hughes (1963) who defines the professional by their esoteric knowledge, as in specialist knowledge only known to a small group.

The findings of the research identified as important the need to professionalise both the sector and the individuals in it. The survey findings, those addressing the benefits to the self, organisation and sector, identified that participants perceived that

studying at postgraduate level would increase the status of career guidance. Increasing qualification levels was perceived as a contributor to professionalisation and increased credibility with other professions. These views reflect those of similar professions such as nursing which has become a graduate profession. Therefore practitioners demand their professional development to build on this at postgraduate level (Caldwell, 2001). Kell (2006) perceives benefits of postgraduate study contributing to the enhancement of professional standing. The debate as to the appropriate academic levels of professional development has yet to be fully engaged with by the guidance sector.

Key enhancements to individual professional development for those engaging in this study focused on reflection and empowerment. The findings would suggest the benefits were essentially inter-related in that increased levels of knowledge enhanced confidence, which in turn empowered the practitioners' views, allowing them to reflect and to promote their knowledge with peers, and managers. This empowerment specifically underpinned and reinforced practitioners' views of themselves as a professional and that they had agency around their professional practice. Caldwell (2001) in her research of postgraduate education for nurses supports this and suggests that three outcomes for the student are empowerment, individualisation and autonomy. All of which has resonance with the findings of this study, as some participants were able to evidence contributing to CPD activities within their employing organisation.

5.4.6 Reflection within professional learning

The findings indicate that case study participants derived real benefit from the opportunities provided to reflect on their practice. The programme provided a framework and permission to reflect on what they do and how they do it, which supports Richardson's (2004) findings concerning postgraduate study. This approach to reflection facilitated participants in often exploring the disjuncture between the roles they undertake and those which they found reflected in the theory, often finding a sense of discomfort between theory and reality. Reid and West (2011) describe this as an issue in experimenting with new models of practice. Participants

suggest the domination of targets has increasingly mechanised practice, resulting in practitioners having fewer opportunities to be creative in their practice. This was felt to undermine their professional identity, as they perceived themselves to have little control of their professional practice. The opportunity to reflect resulted in a number of key outcomes; for example, one participant integrated reflection into her practice to such an extent that she now views her study and practice almost as a continuum and her practice as an ongoing action research project.

This continual reflection on praxis offers an interesting perspective on the nature of professional practice. For other participants reflection was an activity which they had been taught in initial training but had lost the ability to engage with due to the constrictive nature of work. Reflection as a concept provided case study participants with a relocation of their practice within the sphere of the client as opposed to that of the contract/managerial agenda where many of them felt they were located. The importance of the client was reiterated throughout the findings, as was the need to ensure practice was enhanced and developed to meet client needs. This is supported in much of Eraut's (1994) writing, with the perspective that reflection becomes a tool for empowerment within the professional context. Killeen and Kidd (1995) claim that theoretical knowledge is an essential element of the effective reflective practitioner. This case study suggests that the opportunity to have space to engage reflectively both with study and practice leads to increased confidence, self-knowledge and improved professional practice. Similarly to Harrison et al. (2001), reflection was identified by participants as a primary benefit of the programme.

The emphasis on both reflection and client focus was somewhat paradoxical to the practitioners' views of experiential CPD as previously discussed, which essentially had less value because it was not credit bearing. The interpretative reflection approaches, identified by Moon (2004) and Johns (2004), are exemplified by participants throughout all areas of the case study, from the initial application through to those who have completed. All praise the opportunity to step back and review what they do. There would appear to be a lack of appreciation and recognition of experiential CPD as reflective practice. An understanding of what

reflection is would appear to be a learning point for all, as most participants see it as a separate activity that should have time allocated separately. This view is also presented by Bimrose (2004) who suggests that

One of the vital lessons for employers of guidance workers, if they are trying to capitalise on their employees' knowledge, is that they, like any other employer, should provide opportunities for reflection. (Bimrose, 2004:2)

The findings would indicate that the case study suggests that practitioners need to be supported to make the links between reflection and practice more holistically. This would enable practitioners to challenge the more powerful discourses within their organisation and to more vividly discern the benefits of experiential CPD and make greater utilisation of this form of professional development.

5.4.7 Empowerment

The issue of empowerment is particularly interesting, as this was perceived on a number of different levels within the findings. In terms of increased knowledge it was reinforced for many that their knowledge and qualification levels were now higher than those of their managers. Practitioners' knowledge of theory and policy in particular was identified by participants as separating them from their peers. Many referred to the 'bigger picture' and their studies supporting them in developing an informed position in relation to policy decisions that impact on their practice. This relates to what Harrison et al. (2001) refer to as 'naming', which they define within their study as

Naming enables a critical engagement with the politics of practice, a questioning of the assumptions and understandings of 'how things are' in the world which can all too easily be passed over as taken-for-granted truths (Harrison et al., 2001:207).

The adoption of naming potentially offers practitioners the lens through which to reflect on their practice and the context in which they work, creating the foundations from which praxis can then be challenged. This empowerment came with a frustration for some if their views were not valued and they were not encouraged to use their new strengths.

The creation of knowledge through research was identified as an important element of the postgraduate experience, but only in relation to the development of professional practice. There was little evidence that supported participants becoming or having an enhanced role as a practitioner/researcher within their organisation to develop new knowledge. It could be argued that research was not perceived as a priority within their organisation and as such this was translated into their sense of how knowledge was generated and how it applied within their work. This view supports Eraut (1994) who argues that how knowledge is introduced will depend on how it is applied within professional issues.

Richardson (2004) describes how empowerment through engagement in programmes of this type impacted on individuals taking on new and additional responsibilities at local and national level. Within this study two participants in particular used their new knowledge to challenge issues at a strategic level which they had been unable to address as practitioners. One participant left her job to become a freelance consultant contracted to work with the primary contract holder to develop quality in adult career practice across a region in England. Another chose to challenge issues more directly by becoming the union shop steward and using that position to influence what she felt was diminishing professional practice.

This case study focuses on engagement in higher-level study for professional development and how this contributes to professional identity. Freire (1974) claims praxis leads to conscientisation, which is defined as awakening of consciousness (Crotty, 1998:148). Although conscientisation is traditionally viewed within the context of liberating oppressed communities, it could be argued that within the career guidance community many practitioners perceive themselves as an oppressed community. Studies by Greer (2009) and Colley et al. (2008) all reinforce career guidance practitioners as not seeing themselves or being perceived as professionals, and this could be extended into oppression of practice due to government policy. Freire's (1974) work explores the liberation of oppressed communities through education and literacy; he refers to the oppressed seeing themselves as inferior and how the oppressor sees them. Throughout this case study participants have

generally presented their professional practice as being undervalued by managers, combined with being undervalued by society. Through educating practitioners at levels defined by Quinn et al. (1996) as 'systems understanding' and 'self-motivated creativity' practitioners can be supported to create knowledge, reflect and apply it to practice. This would occur as practitioners' confidence builds and they feel empowered to challenge their oppressed status.

From a Foucauldian perspective the programme could be argued as providing permission to challenge the power relations which govern practice. It allows a challenge to uncritical acceptance which is dominant within the workplace (Taylor, 2011). As such, participants recognise that they have power as power is omnipresent (Foucault, 1978). As participants' knowledge increases through academic study and reflection, they are empowered with new and alternative thoughts and ways of thinking about their practice. They then become 'force relations' (Foucault, 1978) within the context in which they work and are in a position to potentially influence and put change into motion. The autonomy that they exercise through their studies supports them in focusing on developing the role they could play in developing professional practice.

This case study suggests that reflection and empowerment offer two vital components in the establishment and maintenance of professional identity for career practitioners. These have contributed to enhancing the professional identity of many who have undertaken the programme. They can equally contribute to the five domains of professional identity characteristics that were identified and provide a driving focus to experiential CPD. It could be argued that the gap in experiential CPD is reflection, this is perhaps the most important element of all CPD. Schön (1983) and Eraut (1994) both see this as a key driver for professional development. A unit on reflection has been recently introduced as core for the new qualifications in career guidance and development. As a result career practitioners may have a greater exposure to and engagement with reflection, allowing experiential CPD to take a more valued place in the CPD hierarchy.

5.5 Limitations of the research

As with all research projects it is often a journey of discovery and if one knew at the beginning what one knew at the end then the research might in fact look very different. Drake and Heath (2011) explore the differences in reviewing what was finally written when compared to the thought processes explored within a research diary; as such all research when reflected on might look different. When considering the approach adopted within this case study, it was constructed to provide a voice to practitioners and an opportunity to present their views. There is a recognition that as a researcher you:

cannot escape the historical and cultural circumstances which shape our own understanding (Reid, 2008:25)

In retrospect the case study would have benefited, particularly within the on-line survey, from a more thorough investigation of the CPD activities that practitioners had engaged in. This could have looked more carefully at views and perceptions of formal and informal CPD, definitions around training and a more in-depth catalogue of CPD undertaken to support the role of the practitioner.

Greater depth might also have been added to the study by exploring more fully the career paths of the participants and types and range of occupations participants had been involved in prior to career work. This topic was explored with participants contributing to the in-depth interviews, but again a focus on this within the on-line survey and narrative biographies might have enriched the data.

To have engaged employers within the study might also have added an additional dimension to the research. However, this was initially considered but discounted as it was perceived as distancing the study from a primary goal, that of the lived experience of the participants. This is an area that would benefit from exploration at a future time.

Some interesting findings have been explored which focus on the views of the case study participants. These have been based on a starting premise that participants were committed to their professional development and to being professional;

therefore the findings result from this idea. To assess the findings more fully in relation to views on CPD and professional identity it is important to have a broader understanding of what other practitioners, not engaged in PG study, think in order to assess if the findings here could have resonance with other career practitioners. Without further research with a range of practitioners with varying qualifications, experience and commitment to CPD the findings presented here can only offer indicative thoughts as to how practitioners view their professional identity and the role that differing types of CPD may contribute to shaping it.

This case study offers a singular view of one masters programme and provided an opportunity to explore the views and perceptions of practitioners who have all to a lesser or greater degree experienced the many changes which have impacted on the career sector over recent decades. Although these findings are contained within one particular case study, and although it may be inappropriate to consider the findings as generalisation in the research sense, the naturalistic generalisation would support the view that they have resonance for other practitioners, students and postgraduate programme leaders within the career guidance world. They offer a window into the world and views of a group of practitioners who perceive themselves as professional but struggle to clearly articulate a rationale for this view. Although the numbers contained in each of the datasets is comparatively small, each reflects practitioners located in a number of environments and contexts. The similarity and commonality of many of the viewpoints offer a veracity that supports the adoption of many of the perceptions for the purpose of fuzzy generalisation (Bassegy, 1999).

5.6 Conclusion

The discussion of the findings from this case study offers a number of interesting concepts that help to present a view of how career practitioners perceive themselves as professionals. It also explores how they feel they are perceived by others and, most importantly for this study, their motivations for choosing postgraduate study as a form of continuing professional development. The research suggests that motivations for PG study are varied; they are often informed by career

development needs, but as practitioners' academic careers progress so does their interest in professional knowledge and research. For most, engagement with this form of study contributed to professional identity construction, but equally it was perceived as contributing to developing a professional career sector. Postgraduate study offers participants a broad range of personal and professional benefits in the form of enhanced confidence, motivation, and an opportunity to engage reflectively in practice and to contribute to organisational development through supporting colleagues.

Chapter 6 Conclusions

An important component of the professionalisation agenda for the career workforce is continuing professional development. This has for a number of years been identified as an area which needed focus (Skills Commission, 2008). The Careers Profession Task Force (2010) has provided a catalyst which will potentially shape the next decade for the career workforce through the adoption of higher-level qualifications, standardisation and registration. This will be achieved through the introduction of a new professional body, the Career Development Institute (CDI) that will provide a national register for those who define themselves as professional career practitioners. Registration will require a commitment to and evidence of ongoing CPD.

It is therefore propitious that this case study has been undertaken at this time, as it provides a unique opportunity to explore a group of practitioners' perceptions and beliefs about the purpose of a particular type of CPD, postgraduate study, and how this contributes to cognition of themselves as professionals and their professional identity. This case study, although a singular context can contribute to a limited body of knowledge about career practitioners think about themselves as a profession. The findings indicate that this group of practitioners view themselves as delivering a professional service that is strongly client focused. Their perception of themselves as professionals is somewhat dependent on comparators with other relatively new professions such as teaching and social work.

Hodkinson (1995) and Furbish and Ker (2002) suggest that it is possible to accept:

The conception of professionalism, without necessarily accepting the exclusivity of profession (Hodkinson, 1995:63)

The case study participants presented a vision of a confused and fragmented occupation. Many did not see their colleagues as professionals and there was a sense of division and differentiation between and within organisations as to

professional practice. There was little knowledge and understanding of other parts of the sector and what other practitioners do; assumptions were made that other areas are more professional without any real evidence to support this view. Practitioners generally tended to specialise and remain with one particular group, for example young people or adults. This reinforces a lack of a defined careers sector which can be quantified as a workforce with common qualifications, a body of knowledge and career progression. Rather, the divisions and silos of professional practice appear to be systemic and to contribute to a continued confusion around the nature of what may or may not be considered professional career work.

This case study was conducted at a time when professionalisation of the skills and lifelong learning sectors is a key policy agenda. It presents the views of a group of practitioners who have taken it upon themselves to professionalise through engagement with postgraduate CPD. Evetts (2006) debates the view that professionalisation is used to control work, set managerial agendas and introduce targets which are used to enhance practice without increases in salary and status. The Careers Professional Task Force (2010) has recommended increased levels of qualifications but there is no discussion about salaries increasing in recognition of practitioners being more highly qualified.

As already discussed the career guidance sector is both complex and fragmented. It contains a broad range of practitioners with differing commitments, motivations and professional status. The practitioners who contributed to this study provide a snapshot of the sector reflecting the main employment settings and roles. What binds this very diverse group together, other than that they have broadly similar job roles, is their commitment to their profession and their professional development. Continuing professional development takes various guises and all engage in different ways and to different levels. Operational, experiential and formal CPD define the predominant types of professional development engagement, with only formal CPD currently valued and perceived as contributing to the development of professional practice.

The formation of professional identity is complex and often individually subjective. There is no clearly defined professional identity for the guidance practitioner other than that all subscribe to and espouse an ethical framework which underpins their commitment to the individual client, wherever and with whomever they work. Engagement in postgraduate level continuing professional development reinvigorates practitioners and contributes to professional identity through reflection, empowerment, knowledge development and increased confidence. Engagement with higher-level professional development, for those who are willing to invest, enhances their professional practice and how they perceive themselves as a professional, and contributes to the professionalisation of the sector. This is achieved through creating critical thinkers who challenge their employing organisations, and critically engage with fellow practitioners and, in some instances, the organisations in which they work. Engagement in postgraduate study defines this group of practitioners as somewhat different to many of their colleagues; they see themselves as more highly qualified, more knowledgeable and ultimately more professional than the practitioners they work with. This therefore suggests that they develop an identity of a professional, building confidence in themselves and the role they deliver.

These practitioners are the pathfinders for the future postgraduate career profession. The programme significantly supports practitioners in developing the five domains of professional identity: specialist knowledge, professional attributes, personal attributes and enabling them to reflect on their ethical practice and client focus.

Professional development would appear to be an important defining activity which differentiates professionals from technicians. This case study presented a range of views in relation to professional development. Most dismissed what employers offered, yet failed to acknowledge the contributions of their employers to their postgraduate study.

CPD at postgraduate level has many benefits. It offers practitioners an opportunity to take a step back, re-energise and connect with the professional elements underpinning practice through research, engagement with a body of knowledge, criticality and self-reflection. This offers benefits to the individual practitioner, their organisation and the sector more broadly. These contribute to professionalisation and potentially create what Douglas (2009b) describes as 'ideal' images on which career practitioners can model their own professional image. To date the lack of 'ideal' images could be a result of a number of factors including lack of cohesive entry routes and fragmented initial training, recognised qualification levels, professional bodies, registration, standards and wider recognition. The idea of being a role model for colleagues was not generally attractive to the respondents but conversely there was significant evidence of wanting to support colleagues and wishing to contribute to the development of practice. This could contribute to the development of a more sustained professional identity for the sector.

The dissemination of this research is therefore of great importance to ensure that practitioners, employers and policy makers have the opportunity to consider the findings and how they might relate to their future vision for the profession.

Chapter 7 Implications for policy and practice

The recognition of Professionalisation was highly important for many participants who also sought recognition for themselves as professionals delivering a professional role. The status of higher-level qualifications was identified as a contributor to this as it was perceived as recognition of value in the professional role, but also as a distancing agent. It could be concluded that the postgraduate higher award established a differentiation between those who held the qualification and their colleagues, especially those who placed little value on CPD.

A key outcome of the Careers Profession Task Force (2010) addresses the professionalisation of the workforce. Allied with this is the ambition to seek chartered status for the profession. The professional project outlined by Larson (1977) is currently being undertaken by the career sector and is being supported and encouraged by government, professional associations and practitioners. Mulvey (2011a) argues that the Task Force has primarily challenged individuals to adopt professional development, and professional associations to work together, to strengthen the profession. These activities reflect the start of the collective mobility project (Larson, 1977) as a way of projecting status for occupations. This study suggests that there is no common understanding of a career sector and that practitioners align themselves with their specialist client group.

At the time when the career sector is undergoing this resurgence and perceived government recognition, it is concurrently being deconstructed by changes in government policy in the guise of the Education Act (2011) which has contributed to significant job losses across the sector (Hooley and Watts, 2011). However, they suggest that the structural changes to the delivery mechanisms for career guidance may reduce the number of specialists in posts delivering career guidance, drive down pay and conditions and contribute to an exodus of staff. There is evidence from Lewin and Colley (2011) that this has been the case with Connexions over recent years and will potentially compound an already difficult situation. Watts (2012)

argues that professional standards being developed by the Career Profession Alliance (CPA), combined with the existing Matrix award (2012) and other quality standards, will provide a strong foundation from which to re-build professional careers services.

A barrier identified by many participants was a lack of confidence to clearly articulate who career professionals are, what they do and being able to promote this effectively. Hughes (2012) argues that, although much has been achieved through the work of the CPA, more needs to be done by career professionals themselves to make their work relevant and to evidence impact. All this suggests that the initial steps have been taken to professionalise career work, but there is still much to do. This study presented a snap shot of an occupational group passionate about the support and help they can offer, yet unable to clearly articulate this and consequently frustrated by the lack of recognition given by clients, peers and funders. This is not just an issue for practitioners but for their employers and professional bodies. Practitioners need to recognise that they are part of a large, well-established occupational group that is valued by policy makers and service users. While practitioners continue to perceive that 'anyone' can give guidance (Douglas, 2009) and undervalue the contribution they make to individuals' lives, the economy and society, they will continue to struggle with establishing their own professional identity and one for the sector.

Career guidance would be advised to focus more on the Freidson (1983) view that occupations should emphasise what he refers to as the 'special characteristics of each rather than the comparatively little they share' (1983:34). The challenge to the sector and practitioners alike is the ability to define what those special characteristics might be. The characteristics of professional identity classified here will provide a good starting point and contribute to the debate as to what is special to career guidance practice.

Although there are many professional associations within the career sector, there is a distinct lack of a defined community of practice. The guidance community is

fragmented and selects its own communities; some select these through professional associations, others through their work environment. The students on this programme chose to select those they wanted in their community of practice as opposed to those that were already established. The opportunity to engage with practitioners outside their normal professional activities was seen as a benefit.

This case study offers policymakers, employers and practitioners an insight into practitioners' views and perceptions of some of the key issues of professionalisation. There is much that could contribute to ensuring that the introduction of professional standards, mandatory CPD and a new professional body is informed by the views of albeit a small group of practitioners, but practitioners who are committed to the professional ideals of career work.

Career guidance may have aspirations to become a chartered profession, but it is currently a long way from achieving this. Whilst practitioner engagement in professional development is so varied and the level of qualifications remains uncertain, career guidance will struggle to define itself as a profession. However, this is not to suggest that many practitioners are not professionals. It is evident from this study that individuals who engage in and own their professional development demonstrate the requirements of the professional; a commitment to developing specialist knowledge, enhancing practice and being open to critique and reflection. Through their example they may motivate their colleagues to self-reflect as practitioners and to aspire to achieving higher-level professional practice. The greatest challenge to this may derive from government policy.

7.1 Further research

This study would be further enhanced through exploring the CPD model and comparing the characteristics of career practitioners' professional identity with those of practitioners who have lower levels of qualifications than those on the postgraduate level programme and who may be less passionate and committed to CPD. This would allow a generalisability to the occupational group and an

opportunity to assess the extent to which other practitioners in other contexts may agree or not with their colleagues on the programme.

It would be of interest to be in a position to undertake a longitudinal study with the study participants and to follow their careers over the next 5-10 years to see how their careers develop. This would offer a greater insight into how their studies may have helped them develop and grow as practitioners.

The nature of what constitutes CPD within the career sector would offer an important area for further investigation. The study has identified a number of key issues around which types of CPD are valued. This has focused around CPD that has been delivered or which participants have actively sought. There has been little opportunity to consider the role of informal CPD, how this is viewed and what activities may be considered to be informal and how they contribute to the development of knowledge and practice.

Employers of the career workforce have been presented in this study as primarily focused on providing CPD for contract compliance, that is to say 'operational CPD', although there is evidence that many of the employing organisations contributed funding to support their staff in their postgraduate study. An opportunity to explore employer perceptions of CPD and where they consider their responsibilities lie would greatly enhance a companion study. The dialogue between practitioner and employer is going to become increasingly important as the responsibility for CPD moves towards the practitioner. The relationship between practitioner, employer and professional association (Mulvey, 2011b) is also going to require investigation. This would provide an opportunity to explore the impact of mandatory CPD on the partnership relationship and the benefits of this view of organisational structure.

Although this study focused specifically on career practitioners, the issues they experience are not confined to the career sector. As such a similar investigation to the role of postgraduate CPD in enhancing professional identity could be applicable to a wide range of occupational groups and study programmes, especially teachers,

lecturers, nurses, youth workers and other occupations that may see their professional status compromised by traditional definitions of what it is to be a professional.

7.2 Dissemination activities

Wanting to contribute to the development of practice is for many doctoral students a primary consideration when choosing this academic route. As such it is a fundamental necessity to use the insights and understanding gained from conducting research to improve the practice of others (Burgess, Sieminski and Arthur, 2006). The choice of a professional doctorate is specific in that wanting to invest in the development of one's professional discipline is part of the motivation. As a researcher practitioner there is both a vested interest and responsibility to contribute to the development of professional practice, to contribute to a better understanding of your occupational area, to extend the body of literature and to promote the researcher practitioner as a vital part of the community of practice.

The themes that this case study addressed are directly located in career professional practice. The nature of ongoing development of professional practice drives the study. It is also of key importance in examining how practitioners are maintaining their perceived professional role within the current changes. Jackson (1998) suggested that developing a research culture within careers education and guidance will be integral to developing innovative and responsive careers services. This case study aims to contribute to this agenda and to share the learning so as to enhance a better understanding of the career practitioner. This will be particularly important as the occupation continues to evolve with the introduction of professional registration.

Prior to the commencement of the research a feasibility study was undertaken with members of two of the professional associations (ICG and NAEGA). The feasibility focused on assessing practitioners' views as to the benefits of higher-level qualifications for practice. This initial study was crucial in assessing if the topic area of this research would have resonance for practitioners. This initial study helped to

shape the themes which would be explored. Since the commencement of the study opportunities have been sought to utilise all opportunities to disseminate the latest findings from the research with practitioners. Professional associations' annual conferences have provided a forum from which to share findings, canvass opinion and to ensure that the study is recognising and reflecting the key issues throughout the sector. As a tutor on the masters programme and trainer within the sector, I have had the opportunity to test out concepts and findings with those I have worked with. All welcomed the discussion around professional practice and the opportunity to consider some of the ideas when developing their knowledge and understanding of theory and reflective practice underpinning career work.

In terms of ethical considerations for dissemination discussed in section 3.6.2. 'The insider researcher', study participants have been provided with copies of publications that have been produced. This was to ensure that they felt part of the research and were aware of what was being published. The majority of them would not have access to academic journals so it was important that they would not be excluded from the dissemination activities. The study participants have welcomed this, and have suggested that they have been able to contribute to the professionalisation of the careers sector.

The initial focus for dissemination has been within practitioner conferences and publications. A list is presented below.

Neary, S., Hooley, T. and Hutchinson, J. (2012) *Careers Workers – The story of simultaneous de- and re- professionalisation*. Seminar presentation. Perspectives on Professionalism, University of Derby, 28 June 2012.

Neary, S. (2011) A careers adviser? So what do you do? *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling*. Vol. 27: 40-46.

Neary, S. (2011) Reclaiming Professional Identity. Seminar presentation. *National Career Guidance Show*, Leeds, 17 February 2011.

Neary, S. (2011) *Reclaiming Professional Identity*. Seminar presentation. iCeGS/NTU Seminar series, University of Derby, 26 January 2011.

Neary, S. (2009) Adult Guidance a profession for the 21st Century; seminar presentation. *Changing Times; Changing Adults; Changing Guidance*: NAEGA Conference, Durham, 7-9 October 2009.

Neary-Booth, S. and Peck, D. (2009) Career guidance - A call to arms. *Career Guidance Today*. Vol. 17(1): 20-21.

Neary, S. and Hutchinson, J. (2009) More questions than answers: the role of practitioner research in professional practice. In Reid, H. (Ed). *Constructing the Future: Career Guidance for Changing Contexts*. Stourbridge: Institute of Career Guidance.

Neary, S. (2008) Higher Level Qualifications for Guidance Workers; seminar presentation. *Advancing Adult Guidance: Personal, Social and Economic Growth*. NAEGA Conference, Keble College, Oxford University, 22-24 September 2008.

The focus for the next stage of dissemination is to submit articles and conference papers for peer review. Audiences and publications will be carefully selected to disseminate some of the broader based concepts from the work such as continuing professional development, new professions, workforce development and professionalisation. I have had a workshop and paper accepted for the Researching Work and Learning Conference at the University of Stirling in June 2013. Other abstracts and articles are in the process of being submitted to:

- British Journal of Guidance and Counselling
- Journal of Learning and Work.

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Guide to the appendices

This section provides a brief overview of the appendices. The appendices are examples of the tools used for data gathering within the research project.

Appendix 1 Application form

This document is an example of a completed application form that has been anonymised to protect the identity of the applicant. It shows the information that applicants need to provide to be considered for the programme. The application process includes both the formal application form and the supporting statement document. These have been annotated demonstrating thematic areas that have been identified. In these documents themes identified included, CPD, Supporting colleagues, theory and policy and practice.

Appendix 2 Online survey

This document is a PDF of the online survey. It shows the various topics and questions that were used to gather perceptions and views from programme participants. The last page of the document contains the pilot questions, which were used to test out the survey tool prior to distribution.

Appendix 3 Topic guide for in-depth interviews

This document contains the list of questions that were used with study participants for the interview stage of the research. These topic areas were constructed as a result of the previous data collecting stages and the literature review.

Appendix 4 Narrative invitation and content

This appendix documents the information sent to programme participants to invite them to contribute to the study. It briefly explains the research topic, what will be required from those who wish to participate, anonymity and the return by date. It also includes a definition of professional identity and 5 trigger questions, which can be used by respondents to inform their thinking.

Appendix 5 Applications Analysis

This document presents the analysis of the application forms (Appendix 1). It shows how the coding was developed and the content analysis being applied. Each application form was given a number which was used as an identifier. These were aligned with the themes that were identified in the application. This document demonstrates how the coding was built up to include initial topic areas identified in the literature review, the topics addressed in the online survey and other themes that were identified as common during the coding process.

Appendix 7 Interview transcript

This appendix is an extract from one of the in-depth interviews. This has been anonymised and information that could be used to identify the employer has been redacted. This presents an example of a discussion and how the interview was coded using the coding frame.

Appendices

APPLICATION FOR ADMISSION TO AN UNDERGRADUATE/POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMME

100104133 M1A1AN MA EDUCATION

PERSONAL DETAILS Title: [REDACTED] Forenames: [REDACTED] Surname: [REDACTED] Home Address: [REDACTED]	APPLICATION ID: [REDACTED] APPLICATION NO: [REDACTED] APPLICATION DATE: 10-08-2008
Home Phone: [REDACTED] Mobile Phone: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]	APPLICATION FOR ADMISSION TO: Postgraduate Programme MODE OF STUDY: E-Learning POINT OF ENTRY: Masters
PROGRAMME CHOICE MX1AN Master of Arts in Education: Postgraduate Professional Development Admit Term: 2008-2009 Academic Year Admit Type: SEP	ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR LEARNING: None Date of Birth: [REDACTED] Nationality: [REDACTED] Residency: Home Country of birth: United Kingdom First Entry into UK: Disabilities/Special Needs: No Known Disability
	Criminal Convictions: N English First Language? Y

APPLICATION/DECISION DETAILS		FEE ASSESSMENT FORM SENT? YES [] DATE:			
ABILITY QUESTIONNAIRE SENT? YES [] DATE:	PASSED TO SUPPORT ADV GROUP? YES [] DATE:	APPROX 3 YEARS WORK EXP (MBA) YES [] NO []			
DECISION	Unc []	Cond []	Rej []	W/D []	Intr []
INTERVIEW DATE	DATE INTERVIEW LETTER SENT	EXPERIENCE IN APPLIED AREA			
CONDITIONS TO BE ADDED TO LETTER/REASON FOR REJECT					
INTERVIEW LETTER SENT	CONFIRMATION REC (INPUT BY & DATE)	DEPOSIT REC	VISA LETTER SENT	J1'S SENT (DATE)	

INTERVIEW NOTES/WORK IN PROGRESS COMMENTS

STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF YOUR APPLICATION

I now feel the time is right on both a personal and [redacted] to take my studies further. After working within the Careers Service and Connections, mainly with young people with special needs, I moved to a special school for young people with emotional, behavioural and social difficulties. I have a real opportunity to make a difference in the lives of some very disaffected and damaged young people and want to further develop my knowledge and skills to help give them the very best start in life. Many of our pupils come from a culture of unemployment and failure. The challenge is to help them make links between school and future life and living to motivate them to make the most of the opportunities given to them and fulfil their potential.

Initially my main role was to provide pastoral support and develop parental and multi-agency work for day pupils but as my team has developed I have increased my input into the work-related learning and careers education, information, advice and guidance programme. I am excited by how I can help engage both staff and pupils in moving this area of the school curriculum forward, both in the classroom and in formal pastoral and care settings.

Whilst I do try to keep up to date with theory, practice and policy, I feel I am only skimming the surface and want to learn more about developments in recent years, eg career narrative. The Certificate in Supervision Studies has greatly helped my development as a reflective practitioner and I am able to critically reflect on my own practice, as well as actively encourage this within my team. I am fully intending to remain in the same employment for the foreseeable future and my employer is fully supportive of my undertaking the research project in the school. However, I am keen to take on a new academic challenge that, whilst being extremely valuable in my current role, will also give me new insights, knowledge and understanding that will help move my career forward on a wider basis.

CPD

Supporting contact of CMT
 (ready update)

REFERENCES

Date	Relation	Name of Referee	Description	Employer
AUG-08	ER	[redacted]	Principal	[redacted]

pupils in moving this area of the school curriculum forward, both in the classroom and informal pastoral and care settings.

3) Describe the guidance work you are involved in including your current challenges and any areas of guidance work you are particularly interested in pursuing further.

Two years ago I left Connexions to work in a non-maintained special school for young people with emotional, behavioural and social difficulties and it is here that my interest in careers education and guidance has been reinvigorated. It is the first time I have been able to fully understand all aspects of a school, including the young people's needs and how the curriculum works. When I started at the school my main role was to undertake pastoral support and develop parental and multi-agency work with the day pupils but as my team has developed I have been able to increase my input into the school's work-related learning and careers education, information, advice and guidance programme.

I am already starting to make a real difference in the lives of some very disaffected and damaged young people and would like to further develop my knowledge and skills to help give them the very best start in life. The concept of career for our young people is a very difficult one as many come from a culture of unemployment and a background of failure. The challenge is to help them understand the links between school and future life and living so they are motivated to make the most of the opportunities given to them and fulfil their potential. This not only benefits the individuals but also society as a whole.

One of my roles at school is to track ex-pupils to find out what they've been doing since leaving school and their views on their time at school, including what they would have liked the school to have done differently and what they would have done differently. Many of them are sure they would have been on drugs and involved in crime if they hadn't been to such a school and have good advice for the current cohort of pupils. I find this area of the work extremely interesting and a valuable resource in terms of reflective practice.

4) Describe any experience you may have of recent study and detail your understanding of how you will manage an e-learning programme in general.

In the last five years I have undertaken several courses at work, the main two of which were the Certificate in Supervision Studies and Certificate in Professional Studies – Understanding Connexions. Both required written assignments, reflective diaries and further reading. I have also done a Level 3 course in Interior Design which, although not an academic course, was entirely done by distance learning and I enjoyed this way of learning. I feel that e-learning will suit me as I find it easy to motivate myself to work at home and I like flexibility around when to work. I am confident using the computer as a way of communicating and will definitely make use of discussion boards and groups.

MA Education Guidance Studies

Dear Student,

I am currently undertaking a research project examining practitioners' motivations for undertaking a masters' level qualification as part of their continuing professional development (CPD). As students and practitioners on the MA Education: Guidance Studies at the University of Derby you are in a unique position to contribute your views and ideas on these areas. This questionnaire will contribute to two research projects (i) to explore how higher level qualifications support practice and professional development and (ii) practitioner views on the concept of the practitioner-researcher.

The questionnaire will take between 30-40 minutes to complete and is submitted electronically. The data from the questionnaire will be anonymised so that no information can be attributed to any individual in the analysis phase. The next stage of the research will involve selecting participants to contribute to one to one interviews either by phone or face to face.

This questionnaire is a pilot questionnaire, and as such you are asked to complete a couple of additional questions at the end to help refine it. The questionnaire needs to be submitted Friday 8th May.

All information you provide will be treated in strictest confidence and will conform to the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998. Please tick the box below to confirm your understanding of the project, how your contribution will be used, and that you agree to take part in the project. You have the right to withdraw from the project at any time.

I would like to contribute to this research project

Yes No

If you would like to contact me to discuss the research project in more detail I would be happy to hear from you. I can be contacted at:

Siobhan Neary-Booth
Co-Director, International Centre for Guidance Studies
University of Derby
Kedleston Road
Derby
DE22 1GB

Email:s.n.booth@derby.ac.uk Tel:01332 591267 Fax:01332 597726

Section 1: Background Information

Name:

Email address:

Q1a Age

Under 30

31 - 45

46 - 59

60 - 65

65+

Q1b Gender

Male

Female

Q1c In which region do you work?

Scotland

East Midlands

South East

Wales

West Midlands

Eastern Region

Northern Ireland

Yorkshire and Humber

North East

North West

London

South West

Q1d In which sector do you work? Please tick all that apply.

HE

Connexions/ Local Authority

Armed Forces

FE

Adult Guidance

Adult Career Service

School

Voluntary/ Community

Other - Please provide details below

Q2 Please provide a brief overview of your primary responsibilities.

Q3 How long have you been working in guidance or related field?

Q4 What qualification(s) do you currently hold that are relevant to the guidance field. Tick all that apply

*Diploma in Careers
Guidance*

*NVQ Level 3 Advice and
Guidance*

OCN

*Qualification in Career
Guidance*

*NVQ Level 4 Advice and
Guidance*

*Other - Please give details in
the box below*

No guidance qualification

Q5 What year did you achieve these qualifications? Please indicate clearly which date applies to which qualification e.g NVQ Level 3 Advice and Guidance, (2002) Diploma in Careers Guidance (2004).

Q6 Which institution(s) did you achieve these qualifications through? Please indicate clearly which institution applies to each qualification e.g NVQ Level 3 Advice and Guidance - City and Islington College London.

Q7 Which of the following is your highest academic qualification?

BA / BSc

MA/ MSc

Degree
equivalent

EdD

PhD

Q8 Are you a member of a Professional Association(s)? Please tick the relevant box

ICG

NAEGA

IAEVG

Other

AGCAS

ACEG

None

If you ticked 'Other' please tell us in the comments box below which Association you are a member or if you selected 'None' any reasons for not being a member.

Q9 Please describe your motivation for undertaking a postgraduate award.

Section 2:Your Studies.

Q10 Please tell us when you started your postgraduate award.

January 2004

January 2006

January 2008

Other - Please give
details in the box
below

September 2004

September 2006

September 2008

January 2005

January 2007

January 2009

September 2005

September 2007

Q11 Which of the following stages are you currently at?

Pg Cert (60 credits or
less)

Go to Q14

Independent Studies
(120 credits)

Go to Q14

Pg Dip (60-120
credits)

Go to Q14

Completed

Go to Q12

Q12 If you have completed your studies at this time please indicate the level of award you have achieved.

Pg Cert Go to Q13 *Masters* Go to Q14
Pg Dip Go to Q13 *No Award* Go to Q13

Q13 If selected Pg Cert, PG Dip or No award please tell us your reason for not choosing to complete a full postgraduate award in the box below.

Lack of time *Lack of funding* *Other*
Family commitments *Achieved what I wanted*
Too challenging *Style of learning i.e. distance*

Please comment on reason selected

Q14 Please tell us how you have funded your studies. Please tick all that apply.

Self *Employer* *Government*

We now want to move to your reasons for choosing post graduate level study

Q15 Which of the following were your primary motivators for taking masters level study? Please select 3 motivators from the list below - 1 indicates your primary motivator.

	1	2	3
Enhance knowledge of theory	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Opportunity to research an interest	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Personal kudos/ prestige/ status	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Professional development	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Personal development	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Personal challenge	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Developing own capability	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Enhance knowledge of theory	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Develop academic skills	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

Section 3: This section explores the role of research within postgraduate study

Q16 A key element of masters' level study is research; we welcome your views on the following. Please select which statement is most accurate for you.

	<i>Agree Strongly</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree Strongly</i>	<i>Don't know</i>
Practitioners engage with research because it is part of their professional ethic ("I research because it is endemic to professional life")?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Practitioners engage with research because it promotes self-actualisation. ("Through research I reinforce my identity as a professional")?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Practitioners engage with research to promote self-actualisation of the clients with whom they work. ("I research to improve my own professional practice")?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Practitioners engage with research because it supports organisational objectives. ("I research because it improves my organisation's practice")?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q17 Please describe below your own personal view on the relationship between your practice and research.

Q18 How important is research to your organisations.....

	<i>Very important</i>	<i>Important</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Not important</i>	<i>Don't know</i>
Policy development	<input type="radio"/>				
Standards of practice	<input type="radio"/>				
Rewards and progression structures	<input type="radio"/>				

Q19 When you decided to undertake postgraduate level study did you have any areas of interest you wanted to research?

Yes No

Q20 If yes please tell us more about the area of interest below.

Section 4: We now want to focus on outcomes for you, your organisation and the sector as a whole.

Why Undertake Postgraduate Research?

For You:

Q21 Through undertaking a postgraduate award please rate which of the following you hope to achieve.

	<i>Very Important</i>	<i>Important</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Not important</i>	<i>Don't know</i>
Self -esteem/ self belief	<input type="radio"/>				
Confidence in myself	<input type="radio"/>				
Improved professional practice with clients	<input type="radio"/>				
Improved professional practice with colleagues	<input type="radio"/>				
Improved research skills	<input type="radio"/>				
Mobility and opportunity to work in other sectors	<input type="radio"/>				
Career progression with current employer	<input type="radio"/>				
Improved job prospects within current sector	<input type="radio"/>				
Increased income	<input type="radio"/>				
Become more motivated	<input type="radio"/>				
Improved critical thinking skills	<input type="radio"/>				
Enhanced theoretical knowledge	<input type="radio"/>				
Better understanding of policy	<input type="radio"/>				
Participate in a community of practice	<input type="radio"/>				

For your Organisation:

Q22

Through undertaking a postgraduate award please rate which of the following you hope to achieve.

	<i>Very Important</i>	<i>Important</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Not important</i>	<i>Don't Know</i>
To be recognised as a Higher level skilled staff member by your employer	<input type="radio"/>				
To be recognised as a Higher level skilled staff member by your colleagues	<input type="radio"/>				
To be promoted as a role model	<input type="radio"/>				
To contribute to organisational development through research	<input type="radio"/>				
Contribute to bidding for new contracts for your organisation	<input type="radio"/>				
Enhance your status within your organisation	<input type="radio"/>				

Benefits to the sector:

Q23

In your view how important are postgraduate awards in achieving the following?.

	<i>Important</i>	<i>Not important</i>	<i>Neutral</i>
Professionalising the sector	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parity with other professions such as <i>teaching</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Increased credibility with other professions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<i>Increase the status of career guidance</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reflect values of supporting individuals to engage in lifelong learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Enhance the quality of services for clients	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q24

Do you consider guidance to be a Profession? Please tell us below your views on this question.

Q25

How do you define your professional identity?

Q26 Do you perceive that postgraduate awards contribute to a professional identity?

Section 5

We now want to move to consider what you think as the outcomes for your studies.

Q27 Have your studies had an impact on your practice?

Yes Go to Q28 No Go to Q29

Q28 If your studies have had an impact on your practice please tell us how.

Q29 And finally, do you have any other comments?

The data collected from all stages may be used collectively and contribute to articles and research papers for dissemination purposes. At the end of the project all the original data will be destroyed. If you would like copies of the collated data and/or copies of any publications resulting from the research these will be made available to you.

Q30 The second phase of this research involves a telephone interview. Would you like to contribute to the interview stage of the project?

Yes No

Q31 If yes, what telephone number should we contact you on?

Thank you for your contribution to this research project

Questionnaire evaluation

Was it easy to navigate your way through the questionnaire?

Yes No

Did you understand the questions?

Yes No

Was the language used accessible and appropriate?

Yes No

Was it clear what you were being asked to comment on?

Yes No

Were any questions difficult to answer?

Yes No

How many minutes did it take you to complete the questionnaire?

What do you think would make this questionnaire more user friendly for other respondents?

Thank you for your support. Please submit your response by using the icon below.

Appendix 3 Topic Guide for In-depth Interviews

Topic areas

Your role

Could you tell me a little bit about your career to date and how you arrived in your current role?

- Need to understand the context of their role and the drivers which have guided it
- How do you describe yourself i.e. job title, role, responsibilities? What do you do in your job?

Training and Qualifications

Tell me about the training and qualifications you have undertaken to support you within this role

- Explore previous training in guidance work since last year/questionnaire completed
- How do you define a professional qualification and do you see yourself as having a professional qualification?
- What CPD have you engaged with?
- How has this helped you in delivering the role you do

Professional Identity

Tell me about your professional identity. How do you define it?

- May need to clarify what is meant by professional identity (how you perceive yourself as a guidance practitioner and what contributes to this)¹
- Definition of professional identity is:

“the relatively stable and enduring constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role”²

- How would you describe your professional identity?
- Do you think career guidance practitioners have a professional identity?
- Is a core identity discernable? What characteristics may be seen to serve practitioners in their professionalisation best? (Douglas’s³)
- Do you feel this has changed throughout your career and in what way? Identify what have been the drivers and how this has made you feel.
- What has been most significant in defining you and your professional identity?
- What do you think contributes to a guidance practitioner’s professional identity?
- What is required to formulate a professional identity?

Guidance as a Profession

¹ Beijaard, D., Verloop, N., and Vermunt, J. (2000) Teachers' perceptions of professional identity: an exploratory study from a personal knowledge perspective. *Teaching and Teacher Education* 16 (2000) 749-764

² Ibarra, H. (1999) Provisional selves: experimenting with image and identity in professional adaptation. *Administrative Science Quarterly*. Vol, (44) (4) : 764-791

³ Douglas, F (2010) *Becoming a Professional: researching the development of career practitioners' professional identity in a New Zealand context*

Would you define career guidance as a profession?

- What do you think defines it as a profession?

Do you see yourself as a professional? What makes you a professional?

- Do clients/other professionals you work with see you as a professional?
- Membership of professional associations – are you a member and how do you contribute/engage with the association?

How do you see undertaking this programme of study contributing to your professional identity?

- Does training and CPD contribute to developing professional identity?
- Does this qualification being PG/masters have more of an impact on your professional identity than other qualifications? In what way?

Appendix 4 Narrative invitation and content

Dear Colleague

Request for research participation

I am currently undertaking a long-term research project to investigate contributing factors in defining the professional identity of career guidance practitioners.

I would like to ask you if you would be interested in contributing to this research as a student registered in the MA Education: Guidance Studies programme.

Your participation would involve your writing a short narrative biography regarding your views of professional identity, I have included a definition of professional identity to help you. In addition, a number of trigger questions are suggested to help focus your ideas. These are outlined below. There is no word limit; it is up to you to decide how much you would like to contribute.

You are not required to include your name within the biography if you choose not to. All the data once analysed will be anonymised and will be unattributable to any individual. I require only the stage you are at in your studies: Postgraduate Certificate (60 credits or less), Postgraduate Diploma (60-120 credits) or Independent Studies (120 credits plus). You are able to withdraw at any point from the study if you wish.

If you are happy to be involved with this valuable research, and to write a narrative biography, please email back to Siobhan Neary at s.neary@derby.ac.uk

We would ask for narrative biographies to be returned on the above email address by 23rd December 2010.

Please note that this research project will conform to the ethical research guidelines of BERA (2004) and of the University of Derby ethics committee (2010).

Thank you very much for your time. I appreciate your help.

Professional Identity definition

“The relatively stable and enduring constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role” Ibarra (1999)

Trigger questions for narrative biographies:

1. How would you define your professional identity? You may want to consider this as how you describe yourself and your job role.
2. What do you think contributes to the formation of professional identity?
3. How has undertaking this programme of study contributed to the development of your professional identity?
4. How would you define the characteristics of the career guidance practitioner in terms of values, beliefs, attributes, motives and experience?
5. Do you consider yourself to have a professional identity and, if so, has it changed over the course of your career? (Please include specific activities which may have contributed)

Please use these as guidelines and feel free to add any other issues in this field which you would like to raise.

Thank you for your contribution.

Siobhan Neary

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Appendix 5 Applications Analysis

Applications and CVs/Supporting Statements analysis

Number assessed 58

Thematic areas	Application number	Context for statement if made
Reflective Practice	19, 28, 32, 37, 43, 52, 65, 67, 71	Evaluate and analyse professional practice
Reflexive Practice		
CPD	2, 3, 67, 57, 72	Have linked CPD and professional development together
Ethics	1, 25, 36, 64, 65	
Altruism		
Professional identity		
Occupational identity		
Professionalism/professionalism	1, 15, 65	Credibility as a professional
Technician		
Competence	30, 46, 51, 67	
Initial training		
Community of practice	7, 26, 52, 66	
Contribution to research	7, 52	
Intellectual challenge	49	
Professionalisation		
Career progression/development	2, 3, 5, 7, 18, 21, 22, 30, 31, 34, 35, 36, 38, 40, 44, 47, 48, 49, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 57, 58, 59, 61, 64, 66, 67, 69, 71	Employability
Autonomy		
Benefits	35, 43, 56, 58, 66, 67, 71	Academic, personal
Empowerment		

Questionnaire topic areas

Personal development	11, 21, 28, 33, 35, 37, 40, 43, 45, 46, 55, 66, 68, 71	Fulfilment, challenge, be the best I can
promotion		
Understand theory	1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 19, 22, 24, 25, 28, 29, 30, 32, 34, 35, 36, 37, 39, 41, 46, 48, 49, 51,	Relate theory to practice 49

	52, 53, 54, 55, 58, 63, 64, 66, 67, 71	
CPD	57, 67	
Relevant qualification	1, 8, 15, 26, 30, 35, 44, 50, 54, 58, 66	Professional qualities
Professional development	1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 14, 28, 33, 35, 41, 43, 53, 58, 59, 66, 67, 71	Skills and knowledge
Interest	7, 11, 19, 21, 29, 41, 44, 46, 50, 53, 68	Joy of study, love of learning, formalise learning
Progress role		
Opportunity to research	3, 6, 7, 15, 20, 25, 31, 32, 38, 45, 46, 51, 52, 53, 55, 59, 61, 64, 65, 66, 67	Contribute to Explore research 46
Kudos		
Develop own capability	1, 59	Skills, approaches, enhance quality
Develop academic skills	5, 20, 31, 32, 37, 40, 41, 45, 47, 51, 52, 53, 55, 71	Research skills, 47, 52, 53, learning from research, academic study

Other topic areas

Develop practice	1, 2, 5, 15, 18, 21, 22, 25, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 34, 35, 38, 39, 45, 46, 49, 51, 52, 55, 58, 65, 66, 67, 71	Understanding of practice, professional practice, enhance,
Develop colleagues	1, 2, 3, 4, 18, 26, 28, 48, 52, 63, 65, 66, 70, 71, 72	
Academic challenge	3, 26, 28, 30, 38, 51, 55, 56, 63, 66, 69, 71	
Policy and practice	3, 28, 41, 51, 53, 58, 64, 67	
Enhance experience	4, 34, 35, 51, 65	Compliment experience
Contribute to organisational development	2, 3, 6, 29, 36, 39, 53, 56, 65, 66	
Reputation of the centre	7, 31, 43, 49, 72	
Develop Knowledge	7, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 26, 30, 32, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 44, 45, 46, 48, 49, 51, 53, 55, 58, 61, 63, 64, 66, 67, 71, 72	Enhance
Become a specialist	15, 22	
Credibility	15, 26	Academic
Skill develop	19, 21, 22, 23, 26, 28, 29, 30, 35, 37, 38, 39, 40, 45,	

	48, 58, 60, 66, 67	
Build confidence	20, 39, 40, 41, 46, 53, 58, 67	
Create new opportunities	20, 72	
Update self	3, 15, 24, 26, 28, 40, 46, 51, 65, 72	
New thinking	24, 71	
Recognition for experience and skills	26, 36, 53	
Achievement	11, 35	
Develop experience	4, 20	
Ambition	7	
Further/higher qualification	19, 21, 45, 48, 61, 69	Academic qualifications 48
Client focus	28, 29, 43, 44, 45, 46, 49, 51, 52, 56, 58, 68, 72	
Expertise	38, 49	
Management of service	40, 52, 66	
In-depth programme	43, 46, 61	Greater depth study 46, deeper insight
Share best practice with students and tutors	45, 46, 51	Understand best practice
Formal learning	44	

Appendix 6 Interview Transcript

SN = Researcher

AK = Participant

AK Right do you want the sort of formal career theory (3a) behind that or just what happened? [SN Oh no just you] AK laughs. [SN Let's not bother about differentialism and all that]

I have been here almost fourteen years [SN Oh gosh] at Connexions and previously when we were [REDACTED] careers. Ehm but going back to sort of how I ended up in [REDACTED] careers. In my final year at school had my careers interview he said, "Oh you should be a teacher based on your expected grades and blah blah." I knew I didn't want to be a teacher but I didn't really know what I wanted to do. But because I said I didn't want to be a teacher he said, "Well I can't really help you then." It was very much this sort of you've got these sort of skills and you should do this. So I was quite arty, quite liked arty things, but there was nothing that offered. Ideally I would have liked to have interior design sort of thing. [SN Yeah]. Which was way before it all became very trendy and there was nothing available locally so I ended up doing hairdressing. I have no idea why but I did hairdressing and beauty therapy because I thought I might want to go and do theatre to do the makeup and stuff. I got a job after three years at college in a hairdressers and absolutely hated it and thought, "What are you doing this for? It is boring." erm. So did lots of bits and bobs sort of work until I was about 21 when I enrolled on a 12 month social work, it was like an introduction to a social work course and from that I thought I really do want a job involving people. Everything I'd done had got quite a lot of customer contact and working with sort of people erm. Went back to see what was the adult careers service then cos I got this big idea about being a social worker and he said, "Are you sure?" and went, "No I'm not sure," cos my dad had put me off it a bit. He said there would be too much red tape and you'll get really cross and blah blah. So this guy says, "Have you thought about studying psychology?" erm and I said "No" and I went away and read about psychology, really liked what I read so did a 12 month access course at a local college which led on to my psychology degree. At the

end of that I'd worked at Alton Towers when I was doing my degree so again more people related stuff [laughs] and at the end of it I thought, "What am I going to do now? I am only qualified to work in a shop." My partner at the time said, "That's ridiculous - you have just got a 2:1 in psychology. How can you say you can only work in a shop?" but I struggled to see the practical skills the vocational side of how I could use it in a job and he actually spotted a job in our local paper for an employment and training adviser with [REDACTED] Careers so he said, "Why don't you apply for that? You could do that standing on your head. You would love it." So I applied and luckily got the job. erm. I knew after a couple of years of that I wanted to do more. I wanted to be more involved (1), why people were doing what they were doing and making the decisions they were making and always felt a real sense of frustration that I got so far in diagnosing the need but then handed them on to somebody else (1, 2a, 3c, 5a, 5c, 5f) [SN Yeah] to carry on with that. So at the time we had an internal training programme (2a) that you could apply to to be a trainee careers adviser (5a, 5c). I got on to that and started in 2000 and did my NVQ 4 guidance through (2a) [REDACTED] Erm Really enjoyed that role but very much community based. Was seconded to a youth offending team and even though we were now connexions. It was still primarily a careers adviser role. (5a, 5c) But after 4/5 years of that I thought I wanted more (1), I want to share my knowledge with other people (5d) and fortunately what we did as a company at that point was to embark on recruiting the senior practitioner and this role that I have got now involved staff supervision, CPD through observations and feedback (6). Then I thought I would love to do that and applied for that and then luckily got that and so 5 years on I am still doing that and clinging onto it with my teeth as we have just going through a massive restructure (7) [SN It's terrible isn't it?]. (7.02)

SN So with that how do you describe yourself to other people when they ask you what you do?

AK I have always clung onto the careers adviser label (5a, 5h). And it was difficult for everybody at the time for careers advisers to be suddenly be re-labelled Personal Advisers (5a, 5h) but I was only qualified about 10/12 months before the change to

Connexions and I felt absolutely devastated. I felt that my professionalism had been ripped away and nobody valued what we did (5c, 5a). [SN Yeah, yeah]. Because social workers and still social workers and youth workers are still youth workers and it was like you can't say careers, you can't say you are a careers adviser (5a, 5h). [SN You can't use the C-word half the time] I know. Now this year we are going to be specialist careers advice service again. So yeah, and the other things is, you say to people. "I am a personal adviser" and they say, "What is that? What do you do?" (5h, 5a) Give it no merit, no professional respect and it's like anybody can do that and because at the time we recruited people from lots of other backgrounds and came in and said, "Yeah, what's this about?" and "Anyone can do it." (5a, 5d, 7). So ... (sighs) (8.23).

SN So thinking about your current role, what is your job title?

AK My current job title is [laughs] Personal Adviser, Practice Co-ordinator, brackets professional practice (5h). [Both laugh SN OK erm, right, that's interesting, it's along one god.]. (8.47)

SN So what sort of training and support have you been given to actually do that role?

AK erm From the company itself very little (6,8). Originally when the job was advertised they said they were going to put us through our NVQ 3 in management and then we started the role they said, "But we are not managers. Yeah we are more senior but we are not managers, we have no line management responsibilities." So then it was a case of we'll look into it and see what we can do and we did solution-focused supervision training with Bill O'Connell. [SN Yeah] So we did a three day training programme with him (6) but then there was nothing forthcoming and that was what started my quest really to find something that would not only help me as a practitioner but would help me in the role I am doing as well. Which is what led me to Derby and the masters. (4) [SN OK]. They have been happy to support me so far cos they agreed to pay half of the finance and they give me some time off for study (8). But it is certainly not anything they have embraced as a county wide thing or

encouraged anybody else to do it. It is just a private arrangement (8)[SN OK we might have a discussion about that later] (10.12)

SN Just thinking about this goes back a little bit to your role and history I suppose as a careers adviser, how do you, what do you describe, what do you think about the term 'professional identity'? What does it mean to you?

AK erm It means having a certain skills set that is up to date and not something that was done 20 odd years ago and has never been revisited (5). It's about for me about adhering to an ethical code of practice (5b) erm and I am trying to think of this in short words [SN That's alright] but [pause]. Yeah having an ethical code of practice, giving the sort of code of practice that we adhere to (5b) that we are all trained and qualified to do and deliver, (2a) keeping those skills up to date. (6) Yeah like proper training, proper qualifications. (6, 2a) And having pride in your profession (5, 5c). (11.27)

SN When you say proper training and proper qualifications, what do you mean by that?

AK I guess I mean a formal qualification (2a). Proper training is a bit harder to define I suppose really because I would consider all the training that I have had has been proper training. To be accredited by either a university or a professional body, [SN Yeah OK] whether it is delivered in a classroom or it's delivered through on the job training with training days. But to be accredited by and recognised (6) [SN So it is about recognition really] Yeah.