

The Current Workplace Experience of Further Education Lecturers and Managers: Still Restrictive After All These Years?

David McClymont

**University College London
Institute of Education**

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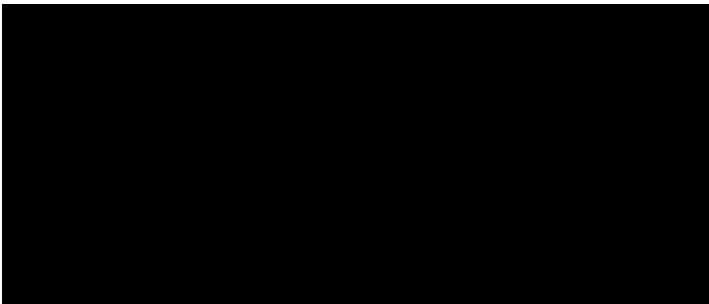
Declaration of word count

The exact number of words in this thesis is 44,983. The abstract, statements, declarations, table of contents, acknowledgements, references and the appendices are excluded from the word count.

Declaration of own work

I, David McClymont, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Signed



Abstract

This thesis uses a single-case study design to provide a qualitative, in-depth exploration of the current workforce experience of managers and lecturers within 'Redgrove', a recently merged, inner-city Further Education (FE) college. Since the incorporation of colleges in 1993 the literature has been consistent in reporting FE settings as difficult, oppressive places to work. At present, the Sector is being radically restructured via merger processes and ongoing, significant qualification reform, whilst colleges are simultaneously reporting severe financial pressures after a decade of austerity measures. The fact that these are largely 'top-down' policy initiatives indicates, as the thesis attests, that FE continues to offer neo-liberal workplace environments in which lecturers and managers struggle to shape key processes. The research organises itself around the premise that three processes are particularly influential in seeking to understand this struggle: policy, professionalism and workplace learning. These are used as three, often integrated, lenses to guide exploration of the case.

The in-depth nature of the case study is supported by the 'insider' status of the researcher, documentation review and seventeen semi-structured interviews. The interviews include narrative accounts from all four of Redgrove's organisational levels: senior, middle and junior managers as well as lecturers. This allows relationships between the different points in the hierarchy to emerge and for a range of perspectives across the three research lenses to be represented. Findings confirm that the FE workplace is marked by recurring interrelated constraints which produce isolating and 'intensive' working days. The process of identifying such constraints is bolstered by application of an expansive-restrictive framework which then works to support recommendations for possible 'ways forward'. These include: removing early plateaus for expert teachers; aligning individual and organisational goals; more intelligent accountability; and opening up workplace structures to provide protected spaces in which to learn and from which to build connections across internal and external boundaries.

Impact statement

FE is under researched and continues to be the object of frequent reforms (the Augar Review proposals of May 2019 are the most recent examples). The effect and appropriateness of these reforms are the subjects of ongoing debate. This EdD thesis adds to the research base and contributes to the debate. In doing so, it demonstrates the importance of continuing to scrutinise FE workplaces in order to support them to be environments in which their workforces can flourish and develop. The theoretical framework uses three complementary research lenses – policy, professionalism and workplace learning – to create a stronger base from which to better imagine ‘positive ways forward’, not just for the case study College but for other providers within the FE Sector and beyond. In adopting this approach, the study is able to provide a contribution to the literatures associated with all three ‘lenses’.

To support the positive momentum referred to above, an expansive-restrictive framework (Fuller and Unwin, 2003, 2004, 2006), seldom applied to FE settings, is incorporated into the theoretical framework. The expansive-restrictive framework is an evaluative tool, relying on characteristics in tension. Its design suggests ‘directions of travel’ which may facilitate more rewarding workplace environments. This has helped inform ‘expansive’ changes within the case setting which was the research’s focus, including: significantly increased links with local employers and the local community; cross-site and cross-level working groups; Continuing Professional Development (CPD) which is more sustained and directed by local teams; and a re-developed approach to learning walks which uses Advanced Teaching Practitioners (ATPs) to lock feedback into the process more securely.

These ‘expansive’ changes have implications for other FE providers, since the restrictive tensions which they are a reaction against exist in many FE settings, even if shaped differently by local contours. Furthermore, the point that the expansive-restrictive framework was a key stimulus for such changes, suggests it can act as an effective evaluative tool in these ‘other’ settings, particularly if supported by clear views on the conditions required to enable professionalism and policy learning to thrive.

Elements of the research were summarised in a lecture delivered at an undergraduate study day organised by Canterbury Christ Church University in 2018 and continue to be incorporated into the curriculum of the PGCE (post-compulsory) and BA in Education and Professional Training run in partnership with the same university. As a member of the Teacher Education in Lifelong Learning (TELL) Research Network, the findings will also be presented at one of the network’s ‘research showcase’ conferences. The

network's membership presents a mixed Higher Education (HE)/FE profile, providing opportunity to discuss the relevance of the project's conceptual propositions in HE settings. It will also be important to carry these propositions into wider FE networks, many of which appear to be looking to organise along expansive-type lines. The Greater London Authority's 'Skills for Londoners' strategy provides a good example in its emphasis on pan-London connections and multiple stakeholder hubs. Redgrove – the case setting – has already begun work with one such hub: the Mayor's Construction Academy.

Contents

Title page	1
Declarations	2
Abstract	3
Impact statement	4
Contents	6
List of figures and tables	9
List of appendices	10
Acknowledgements	11
Reflective statement	12
Glossary of abbreviations	17
Chapter 1: Introduction to the research	
- Research rationale and aim	19
- Structure of the thesis	21
Chapter 2: The crucial roles of policy, professionalism and workplace learning in FE settings	
- Literature review: policy	23
- Policy: a working definition	23
- FE policy: key ideological underpinnings	24
- FE policy: historical overview – four phases (1993-2017)	26
- FE policy: historical phases – a summary	33
- Literature review: the FE profession	33
- Introduction of terms	33
- Professionalisation in FE: policy overview	34
- Professionalism: anchoring concepts	35
- Professionalism: knowledge	36
- Professionalism: autonomy	39
- Professionalism: responsibility	41
- Professional models: positive ways forward	42
- The FE profession: key lessons	44
- Literature review: workplace learning	45
- Workplace learning: introduction	45

- Workplace learning: expansive and restrictive learning environments 46
- Workplace learning: complementary perspectives – building on the expansive-restrictive approach 50
- **Conclusion and theoretical framework** 52

Chapter 3: Approach to the research

- **Introduction** 57
- **Methodology** 57
- **Research design: case study** 58
- **Methods** 61
- Semi-structured interviews 62
- Documentation 64
- **Sampling** 65
- **Data analysis** 68
- Analysis: interview data 68
- Analysis: documentation data 69
- **Ethics** 69
- **Conclusion** 71

Chapter 4: Stories from the FE workforce – a presentation of findings

- **Introduction** 73
- **Senior managers** 74
- Policy 74
- Professional criteria 77
- Workplace learning 79
- Senior managers: a summary 80
- **Middle managers** 80
- Policy 80
- Professional criteria 82
- Workplace learning 84
- Middle managers: a summary 85
- **Junior managers** 86
- Policy 86
- Professional criteria 87
- Workplace learning 90
- Junior managers: a summary 92

- **Lecturers** 93
- Policy 93
- Professional criteria 95
- Workplace learning 98
- Lecturers: a summary 99
- **Conclusion** 100

Chapter 5: Making sense of the FE workplace – a discussion of findings

- **Introduction** 102
- **Leadership in the workplace** 104
- A vision of leadership 104
- Expansive leadership visions meeting context 105
- **Coping with policy** 106
- Senior managers 106
- Middle managers 107
- Junior managers 110
- Lecturers 111
- **Professional esteem** 113
- **Professional development** 115
- Scholarly activity 115
- Structured space for development (with employers in mind) 116
- Internal opportunities for development 118
- **Conclusion** 122

Chapter 6: Conclusion

- **Introduction** 124
- **The research questions** 124
- **Contribution to education research and knowledge** 129
- **Evaluation of the research** 130
- **Impact on professional role and case study setting** 131
- **Dissemination and development of findings** 132

References 133

Appendices 154

List of figures and tables

Figures

<i>Figure 1: Models of governance</i>	25
<i>Figure 2: Government model of public service reform – simplified version</i> ...	28
<i>Figure 3: Essence of the theoretical framework</i>	53
<i>Figure 4: Chapter 4: thematic map</i>	165
<i>Figure 5: Chapter 5: thematic map</i>	166
<i>Figure 6: Model of dual professionalism (Institute for Learning)</i>	171

Tables

<i>Table 1: Expansive-restrictive framework (long version)</i>	46
<i>Table 2: Freire’s characteristics of oppression in an FE context</i>	154
<i>Table 3: Profiles of research participants</i>	66
<i>Table 4: Expansive-restrictive framework – short version – adapted from Fuller and Unwin (2006, p. 61)</i>	102
<i>Table 5: Single-case thematic matrix (extract) – supports Chapter Four</i>	162
<i>Table 6: Condensed-case thematic matrix (extract) – lecturer version – supports Chapter Four</i>	163
<i>Table 7: Condensed-case thematic matrix (extract) – supports Chapter Five</i>	164

List of appendices

<i>Appendix 1: Freire’s characteristics of oppression in an FE context</i>	<i>154</i>
<i>Appendix 2: Colour coded extract of interview transcript</i>	<i>155</i>
<i>Appendix 3: Interview schedule</i>	<i>159</i>
<i>Appendix 4: Single case thematic matrix (extract) – supports Chapter Four</i>	<i>162</i>
<i>Appendix 5: Condensed case thematic matrix (extract) – lecturer version – supports Chapter Four.....</i>	<i>163</i>
<i>Appendix 6: Condensed case thematic matrix (extract) – supports Chapter Five</i>	<i>164</i>
<i>Appendix 7: Thematic maps</i>	<i>165</i>
<i>Appendix 8: Research information sheet</i>	<i>167</i>
<i>Appendix 9: Informed consent form</i>	<i>170</i>
<i>Appendix 10: IfL’s model of dual professionalism.....</i>	<i>171</i>

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Reflective statement

I completed an MA in Film Theory in 1999, assuming at the time that any further study would be based within the same academic area. Film had been one part of my first degree and at the beginning of my FE teaching career formed a sizeable part of my timetable: A-Levels; degree programmes and then when on a year's teaching exchange in the USA in 2001. As the years passed, however, the idea of studying Film began to seem like an indulgence, partly because I was teaching less of it, but mostly because of a sense that I should engage with the setting for my professional career more seriously. By 2011, the point at which I enrolled on the Doctorate in Education (EdD), I had worked in FE for twenty years – ten of which had involved lecturing on and then managing teacher education programmes – and yet considered myself to have only a superficial understanding of its history, how it was funded, of the policies and academic discussions which engaged with it. Work processes took up a lot of my time, could be oppressive and were frequently opaque – three good reasons to scrutinise them – but I also now realise that issues around identity were folded into the decision to 'sign-up' for the EdD. In committing to continue my FE career, I wanted to bring a more mature, creative disposition to it.

In looking back now at the reflective statement I provided for the 'Portfolio of Year 1 Assignments' in 2012, I can see many of the root influences which I would work on and want to return to throughout the EdD. In 'Foundations of Professionalism (FoP), the first assignment, the work of Eric Hoyle (1995, 2001, 2008) is already being used as an important reference point when considering professional work, as is Stephen Ball's (2003, 2008) 'take' on neo-liberal 'policy technologies', as well as the notion that FE professionalism might be in crisis (Robson, 1998). FoP allowed just the starting point I was looking for, in fact, since it provided the opportunity to begin building an historical and critical overview of the Sector. The reading to support the assignment also started the powerful process of exposing me to the stories and voices of fellow practitioners (see, for example: James and Biesta, 2007; Jephcote and Salisbury, 2009). These voices, in unison, railed against the very same issues which made my own work setting difficult: intensification, policy overload, undemocratic processes, and so forth. They also acted as reminders of the rewards and possibilities which FE work can bring. These voices were reassuring and helped give more definition to my own professional reflections.

The generous feedback on my FoP essay provided more reassurances, helping to soothe those 'imposter' concerns that I think many share before a course's first

assessment, particularly when stepping up a level. As a teacher educator I had often passed on Brookfield's (1995) advice that, to maintain empathy, retain humility, teachers needed to return to being students throughout a career, be reminded of the pensiveness and vulnerabilities which students may bring with them into formal learning environments. The FoP process, the EdD programme processes more generally, have confirmed the soundness of this advice and I feel have supported me in becoming a more effective practitioner.

The remaining two assignments in Year 1 – Methods of Enquiry (MoE) 1 and 2 – introduced me to the practice and theory of research. I was a complete novice as a researcher and used both modules to gradually establish a working knowledge of the underpinning theories and the mechanics of actually 'getting out there' and collecting data. I can see from the 'Methods' section of MoE 2 that, when interviewing, I was still working through where to sit, how to avoid convoluted preambles into questions and coming to terms with the point that the difficulties involved in balancing pre-conceived 'purposes' with participants' unique accounts of their professional roles might never go away. The research topic chosen as the basis for these assignments was 'HE in FE'. This came out of the desire, referred to above, to better understand the details of my working life. My professional duties at the time involved managing and teaching on various HE in FE programmes. These included Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses; an undergraduate degree in Education and Professional Training; Professional Development support for HE in FE staff; and several HE in FE partnerships.

The Institutional Focused Study (IFS) commenced in September 2012 and was handed in on February 1st 2014. The EdD assumes the IFS will build on the work of MoE 2 and that was the case for me, since I used it to extend my research into the HE in FE provision situated in the College where I worked. Whereas MoE 2 had provided limited space for findings and had involved only four HE in FE lecturers, the IFS (at 20,000 words compared to the 4,000 of MoE 2) allowed me to put together a relatively detailed research project for the first time. I interviewed twelve participants at different levels in the organisation (lecturers, middle and senior managers); consulted a plethora of internal and external documents; and undertook a much more extensive literature review. Interestingly, it was only when returning to the IFS for the purposes of this 'statement', that I realised ten of the twelve interviewees had left the College in the intervening five years and that, of the two who remained, one had withdrawn from her full-time middle-management role into a fractional lecturing position.

This instability in the case setting was a key feature of the IFS findings and was often linked to the volatile world of policy. For instance, the College was straining to expand its HE in FE offer, in response to encouraging policy speeches and initiatives (BIS, 2011), but then found its ability to do so undermined by Government inconsistencies. For example, HE in FE relies heavily on adult students and yet this supply was being constricted by the introduction, in 2013, of 24+ loans for Level 3 study. In addition, although there was still a cap on core full-time HE numbers at the time, extra 'margin' numbers were made available for organisations which committed to offering provision at a cost significantly below the £9,000 fee cap (an enormous increase in HE pricing) introduced by the Government in 2011 (BIS, 2011). It was mostly FE colleges which applied for these 'low-cost' margin numbers, seeing it as an opportunity to 'grab' an extra slice of the HE market (Parry et al., 2012). However, although the numbers made available were 20,000 in the first year of operation (2012/13), they were reduced to 5,000 for the following academic year, providing a good example of the short-termism endemic to the policy environment which FE colleges have to operate within.

Of course, I was used to policy washing in and out of my work context but setting the time aside to make sense in a deliberate way was something that had only begun to happen upon starting the EdD. For the IFS, this making sense relied heavily on colleagues (interviewees) who, even though we shared an HE focus at work, I had rarely interacted with regarding the substance of that work. Certainly, for me, the deliberative interactions which formed the IFS interviews, the stories, the attempts to explain what was happening in the workplace, helped deepen my understanding of the connections, fractures and struggles for identity which we were all entangled in.

The IFS had some impact at work: an HE specific peer observation scheme, controlled by HE lecturers, was introduced; the existing HE in FE professional development module was re-written with a university partner to allow accreditation at Level 7; scholarly activity time was better protected in timetables; sections were asked to produce more comprehensive reports on progression; and the decision to expand HE using the isolating Higher National routes was reviewed. I decided, however, not to continue with HE in FE into my final thesis. Although my College was looking to expand its HE offer, it was a niche section of the provision. The high-stakes curriculum offer was that which fed into the headline achievement data and fell under Ofsted's remit. If I really did want to understand my professional setting more thoroughly, I felt it was this high-stakes provision (16-18 study programmes, for example) which I now needed to scrutinise. I was not quite starting afresh, since I wanted professionalism to remain an important aspect of the research, but the change of focus required my reading on

policy to be considerably extended. Additionally, since I was now adopting a broader view of context, I needed to think more closely about the connections between the different parts of the whole. This led me to return to Fuller and Unwin's (2003, 2004, 2006) expansive-restrictive framework – it had been briefly considered within the IFS – since, amongst other things, it is interested in the quality of a workplace's connections. From there, I began to look at the literature on workplace learning more generally, recognising it offered highly relevant views on the elements needed to assist workplaces to be enriching rather than oppressive environments. This latter point has been an important consideration for me throughout the EdD.

Although my reading was gradually steering me to structure the thesis using the three exploratory lenses of professionalism, policy, and workplace learning, I still needed to decide where to carry out the research. Initially, I assumed I would move away from inside research but, ultimately, chose to base the research at a college within the same merged Group as my own. There were two key reasons for this decision: firstly, although it would be new research ground for me I had a good working knowledge of the chosen college and felt this would bring added depth to the research; secondly, whilst I was deliberating, we were folded into an even larger merger which promised to create a series of interesting ripple effects across all the colleges involved.

As the literature I was reading was changing to accommodate the move away from HE in FE, I also began to put myself forward for projects and responsibilities which lay within the high-stakes part of my workplace's curriculum. Consequently, my duties at work have changed significantly over the last few years. Having 'plateaued' within marginal provision – mostly content to exist 'under the radar' – for many years, I have now moved up the hierarchy to manage high priority elements of the 16-18 Study Programme: Employability, and English and Maths. I retain responsibility for Initial Teacher Education but it is a comparatively small part of my responsibilities and given scant attention by my employers. These new roles, as was the hope, have been invaluable for my research, introducing me to an array of new contexts, challenges, conversations, rewards and pressures. The last three years, particularly, have required a lot of very fast learning on the job with the EdD providing a supportive and vital backcloth for this. Whilst work has been frantic, the reading I have been engaged in simultaneously, has meant that I have been able to detach myself to some extent, bring in reflective resources from beyond the maelstrom. I was also always writing during this period and this act of writing was crucial in helping me to bring together what I was experiencing, reading and thinking.

The EdD, then, has been transformative, not least because it was the catalyst for a significant change in the nature of my professional work. It has also provided a platform for me to read extensively about this work and to develop the academic and research skills required to interpret and apply the reading appropriately. I now feel more confident in my ability to make a difference at work and to support colleagues to do the same. This, to some extent, is the more mature, creative disposition I was hoping for.

Glossary of abbreviations

ABR	Area Based Review
ATP	Advanced Teaching Practitioner
BERA	British Education Research Association
BIS	Department for Business, Innovation and Science
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council
CAVTL	Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning
CDF	Capacity Delivery Fund
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DfE	Department for Education
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
EdD	Doctorate in Education
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
E&T	Education and Training
ETF	Education and Training Foundation
FE	Further Education
FEFC	Further Education Funding Council
FENTO	Further Education National Training Organisation
FETL	Further Education Trust for Leadership
FoP	Foundations of Professionalism
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HE	Higher Education
IfL	Institute for Learning
IFS	Institutional Focused Study
IQAR	Institutional Quality Annual Review
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
LLSC	Local Learning and Skills Council
LLUK	Lifelong Learning United Kingdom
LPP	Legitimate Peripheral Participation
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
MoE	Methods of Enquiry
MoT	Meeting our Targets

Ofqual	The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
PGCE	Professional Graduate Certificate in Education
PMSU	Prime Minister's Strategy Unit
QTLS	Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills
SET	Society for Education and Training
SME	Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise
TELL	Teacher Education in Lifelong Learning
T-Level	Technical Level
TLA	Teaching, Learning and Assessment
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
UCU	University and College Union

Chapter 1: Introduction to the research

Research rationale and aim

As Stephen Ball (2013, p. 33) has put it: “workplaces should be places where we flourish and grow and are encouraged and supported. They are social settings in which everyone deserves respect and has the right to feel valued”. The motivation for this thesis arose from a concern that FE workplaces remain some distance from this ideal and that, subsequently, those who work in them suffer under constraining and restrictive conditions. Therefore, the central aims of the research were: to form a better understanding of those forces which might be working to sustain such impoverished settings and to explore how these could be marshalled differently, with a view to enriching working lives.

I have worked in FE since 1991, first as a part-time lecturer and then, via the ‘long interview’ process (Gleeson and James, 2007), as a full-time lecturer across several curriculum areas. For the last five years or so I have held a middle management role whilst continuing to teach for three hours a week. My career started just before Incorporation in 1993 and, as Chapter Two will show, has coincided with FE being hauled across an ever-changing terrain of policy initiatives, restructures and conflictual industrial relations. For much of this time I was aware that FE was under-researched (see, for example: Johnson, 1997; Lucas and Unwin, 2009; O’Leary and Rami, 2017) and yet had taken no steps to ‘capture the voices’ (O’Leary and Rami, 2017, p. 74) of the FE workforce and ‘better understand’ my professional context. The impulse to take on a different, more research focused professional identity can perhaps be traced back to one incident. The College where I was employed (and still am) had been subjected to an Ofsted inspection and staff were asked to report to the Sports Hall, where senior managers were waiting on a raised platform, to be given the grading judgement. With much fanfare, including rhetorical devices intended to build suspense, we were declared to be ‘Good’. The senior management team, some overcome with emotion, some expressing loud vindication, then exchanged bouquets of flowers with each other whilst the rest of the workforce looked on. As I observed this (for me) troubling scene unfolding I realised I felt a profound disconnection, not only with the bouquet exchanging senior managers but with those around me who responded positively to what they were witnessing. Afterwards, in conversation with peers, I became aware that my discomfort was shared by a significant number of others, and that this forged or strengthened important connections between us. The roots of the thesis can be found then, amidst overlapping social bonds and fractures.

The disconnect described above can be theorized in a variety of ways. Marx's (1844) concept of alienation suggests oppressive working conditions create antagonism since some inevitably lose control of context and become the instruments of others' desires (a 'good' Ofsted grade, perhaps). Freire (1996) cites Marx frequently and describes alienation as emerging, in part, from a lack of empathy. Subsequently, when those with power speak, "their talk is just alienated and alienating rhetoric" (Freire, 1996, p. 77). I did not value Ofsted's judgement and so was unsettled, confused by the depth of affirmation it provided for others. Bourdieu (1990) might conclude that the disconnect was a form of 'hysteresis'. In other words, my values were no longer aligned with those of the more powerful in the dramatically altered 'field' (structured social space) of education and I was, subsequently, 'out of time', working to different rules (or 'doxa', in Bourdieu's terms).

Bourdieu and Freire are drawn upon occasionally in the thesis but it was a short book on improving workplace learning (Evans et al., 2006), including a consideration of expansive-restrictive workplace learning conditions, which seemed to promise most in helping to understand how I had felt during the bouquet exchange scene whilst also supporting a coherent approach to the task. For example, within the book, Fuller and Unwin (2006, p. 57) suggest that:

The way employees experience expansive environments has to do with the feeling of "being a part of a team," whereas a restrictive environment is associated with "being an outsider or mere observer" in the workplace.

Workplace learning in FE cannot be separated from professionalism (Sachs, 2003; James and Gleeson, 2007). The thesis, therefore, has also been shaped by debates around professional identity and the construction of new models of professionalism which might better negotiate restrictive working environments, make the flourishing conditions wished for at the beginning of this introductory chapter more likely. Whitty's (2006, 2008) call for a more democratic professionalism within education, for example, is a reminder that 'effective' democracies rely on people perceiving they retain a strong stake in their processes. This stake is forged by debate and the space to build connections and mutual understandings (Coffield et al., 2008), characteristics which are also typical of expansive learning environments. In Whitty's terms, therefore, my sense of 'disconnect', my weak stake, might be explained by undemocratic tendencies within the workplace as well as within those external structures which orbit it.

The research, consequently, proceeded from a perspective that the processes of workplace learning and professionalism would be important lenses by which to scrutinise the workplace experience of FE lecturers and managers. It then became

apparent, from initial reading, that policy was inescapably entwined within both concepts and would need to form a third lens. The lenses would work together to offer a more accurate, more complete view of the FE workplace. Deciding to use these particular lenses gave more definition to the research aims: the forces which would need to be better understood and marshalled differently were: workplace learning, professionalism and policy.

Structure of the thesis

The thesis is formed of six chapters. The introduction is Chapter One.

Chapter Two provides a review of the literature pertaining to the three key concepts (forces) referred to above. The chapter begins with an overview of policy and its effects on FE since Incorporation in 1993. It then moves onto a consideration of professionalism; this is anchored by what Hoyle and John (1995) consider to be recurring features of the discourse which surrounds professionalism in education: knowledge, autonomy and responsibility. The third section of the chapter switches attention to workplace learning, particularly Fuller and Unwin's (2003, 2004, 2006) theory that workplace learning environments can be effectively evaluated using an expansive-restrictive framework. Finally, the chapter introduces the theoretical framework and the research questions which drove the research.

Chapter Three outlines the methodological approach taken. It demonstrates how decisions linked to research design (case study) and methods (interviews mainly but also documentation and observation) were in sympathy with the research questions and flowed from the qualitative stance adopted. The case is defined and, since the semi-structured interview was the key tool for data collection, there is detailed consideration of its strengths and weaknesses. The chapter then moves on to consider issues around analysis and to provide a rationale for the sampling decisions taken within the case. Finally, the chapter explores a number of ethical dimensions, including the implications of being an inside researcher.

Chapter Four presents the research findings. The findings are organised by the four hierarchical levels which pertain within the case study setting's organisational structure: senior manager, middle manager, junior manager, and lecturer. Each hierarchical level is then divided into three sections. These sections correspond to the three organising and structuring concepts in the research: policy, professionalism and workplace learning. Each section is further divided into the same sub-headings. Most of these sub-headings were formed ahead of the research and so were *a-priori* (Braun and

Clarke, 2006; King and Horrocks, 2010) in nature. Professionalism, for example, uses Hoyle and John's (1995) crucial characteristics of knowledge, autonomy and responsibility. Two sub-headings were suggested by *post-priori* themes which were interpreted as significant during the research. For example, participants often spoke at length about the notion of being 'set free' by policy and so this was used to help organise findings within that section. Participant accounts dominate throughout the chapter, although these are supplemented by data from documentation and observation where this was deemed to be useful. The space given to the voices of participants is in line with Cohen, Manion and Morrison's (2011, p. 290) advice that, "it is important in case studies for events and situations to be allowed to speak for themselves".

Chapter Five builds on the previous chapter and provides a comprehensive discussion of the findings. It uses Fuller and Unwin's (2003, 2004, 2006) expansive-restrictive framework to support examination of the processes of workplace learning, professionalism and policy in the case study setting. The chapter frequently reaches back into Chapter Two's literature review to help support interpretations but is also informed by reading made necessary by the analytical process (literature on middle management, for instance).

Chapter Six offers a conclusion to the thesis by returning to the research questions to discuss how they have been addressed and, consequently, what contributions can be offered to advance education research and knowledge. The chapter also evaluates the research processes and considers the degree of impact the findings may carry with regards to my professional role and within the case study setting itself. Finally, suggestions are made for disseminating the research findings.

Chapter Two: The crucial roles of policy, professionalism and workplace learning in FE settings

This chapter's structure is informed by the research project's main premise: that the FE workplace can be interrogated successfully by approaching it via three key processes: policy; professionalism; and workplace learning. These act upon and shape each other. The literature relevant to each is reviewed in turn, using three main sections. These sections create the foundations for the theoretical framework and research questions which are considered in the final part of the chapter.

Literature review: policy

Policy: a working definition

Policy is seen as central to understanding educational settings. Coffield et al. (2008, p. 37) suggest that, for the FE workforce: "policy creates the general atmosphere and sets the conditions under which they have to work". Ozga (2000, p. 3) feels: "It is difficult to imagine an educational research project that takes place 'outside' policy". However, as Finlay et al. (2007, p. 138) point out: "policy is a loose term", and there is much discussion in the literature as to what it entails.

Ozga (2000) considers policy to be a process which permeates education settings, shaping the identities of those working there and producing 'contestation' and 'mediation' as it does so. Clarke and Newman (1997, p. 51) share this 'dynamic' view: "Managers are not just the technical conduits through which policies are implemented. The process of institutional elaboration means that the outcomes of reforms are unpredictable".

Ball, Maguire and Braun (2012, p. 2) describe such institutional elaborations as 'enactments', arising from numerous translations and contextualisations of policy in practice (see also: Ball, 2008). These occur at many levels in organisations (as policy moves through a hierarchy for instance) causing policy to become 'iteratively refracted' (Supovitz and Weinbaum, 2008, cited in Ball, Maguire and Braun, 2012, p. 4). Since settings are not homogenous these 'elaborations' and 'refractions' take unique shape within each organisation. Therefore, whilst governments maintain a privileged position and can set powerful discourse contexts, policy can be (re)created at many different points.

This 'messiness' (Hodgson and Spours, 2006) is accentuated by the sheer amount of policy which the FE sector has been subjected to. The scale of reform was captured in

a City and Guilds (2014, pp. 8-9) overview of skills and employment policy. Over the last forty years, it counted: seven major reports; twenty-eight major acts; five re-brandings of ministerial department; and sixty-one Secretaries of State. These numbers indicate that much is seen to be at stake in the Sector. The next section considers the key ideological drivers which have shifted FE from a position of 'benign neglect' (Lucas, 2004a; Simmons, 2010) to one of 'policy hysteria' (Keep, 2006).

FE policy: key ideological underpinnings

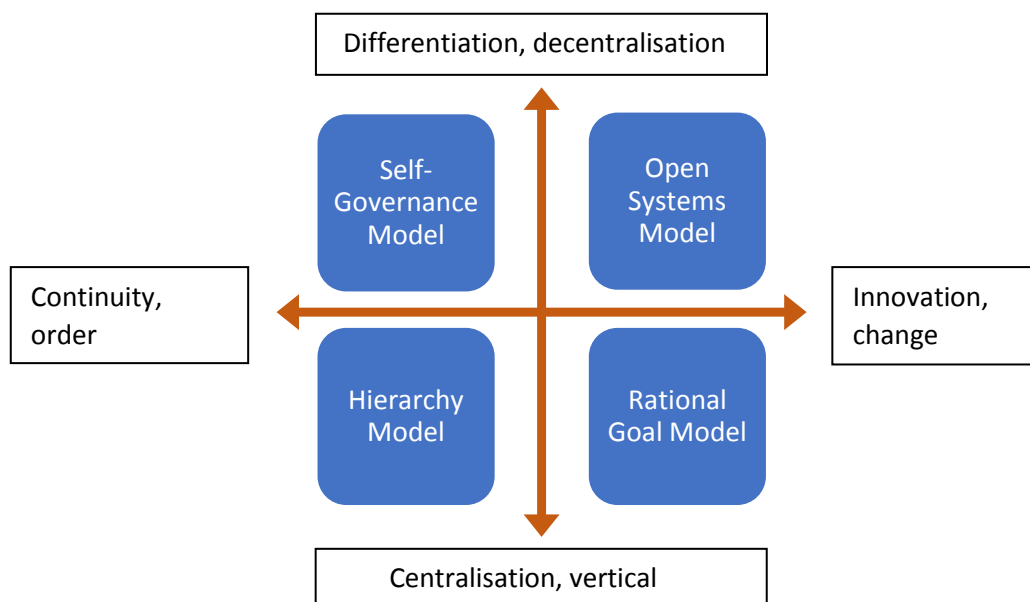
The Further and Higher Education Act of 1992 is widely recognised as ushering in a new policy era for FE. It removed colleges from local education authority control, devolving responsibility for premises, staff and finances (Lucas, 2004b). Colleges remained heavily reliant on (now centralised) public finances, via the newly formed Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), but were encouraged to: "earn money from a variety of sources and [were] free to charge what private fees the market will bear" (Smithers and Robinson, 2000, p. 3).

For Ball (2003, 2008) and many others (for example: Randle and Brady, 1997; Ainley and Bailey, 1997) policies such as the 1992 Act were part of a broader educational reform movement which was neo-liberal in nature. This neo-liberal approach can be understood as containing, "three interrelated *policy technologies*: the market, managerialism and performativity" (Ball, 2003, p. 215). These 'technologies', "play an important part in aligning public sector organisations with the methods, culture and ethical system of the private sector" (Ball, 2003, p. 216).

As Ball's reference to 'technologies' implies, this neo-liberal context is not arrived at via 'spontaneous evolution' (Olssen and Peters, 2005), underwritten by basic State protections, as with models of classical liberalism. It is created by the State. This involves constructing 'manipulatable man', who is then, "continually encouraged to be continually responsive" (Olssen, Codd and O'Neill, 2004, p. 137) and enterprising. Such 'encouragement' is driven by introducing more opportunities for relative judgements – this is Ball's (2003) notion of performativity (taken from Lyotard, 1984) – and within education was to assume the form of performance tables, Ofsted grading schemes, appraisal score cards and so forth. Such 'performative competition' (Ball, 2003) required what Newman (2001) terms 'new public management'. This management style is characterised by 'low-trust relationships' (Clarke et al., 2000, p. 6) and, for Hall (2005, pp. 326-7), "replaces professional judgement, ethics, and control by swallowing wholesale the micromanagement practices of audit, inspection,

monitoring, efficiency and value for money”. Ozga (2000, p. 6) states that the resulting managerialism is the ‘antidote’ to public sector professionalism.

These neo-liberal education reforms were based on the policy assumption that what had existed in FE was ineffective, inefficient and unlikely to meet the emerging demands of the ‘knowledge-based economy’ (see, for instance: Wolf, 2002; Simmons, 2013). As Biesta (2010) states: views on what might be deemed ‘effective’ are laden with value positions and power relations. Who gets to define effectiveness and the nature of the changes required? Approaches to these questions can be opened-up by scrutinising the concept of governance. Newman (2001), citing Quinn (1988), identifies four governance models and distinguishes between them using ‘two dimensions of difference’. These are centred on two continuums, centralisation/decentralisation and order/change, which are expressed as axes (see *Figure 1*, below).



(*Figure 1: Models of Governance (Newman, 2001, p. 34)*)

A significant aspect of this approach is that contradictory governance models are shown to co-exist and exert influence on each other, creating ‘oscillation’ and tension in policy processes (Newman, 2001; see also: Olssen and Peters, 2005).

Whilst there has been oscillation, Keep’s (2006, p. 48) position is that:

the dominant trend within the English E&T [Education and Training] system since the early 1980s has been the increasing power of the state – in the shape of central government – to design, control and implement policy at every level.

This view of the State aligns FE with the ‘Hierarchical’ quadrant of Newman’s matrix although, since control is often associated with quangos (Hodgson and Spours, 2006), and managerialism, the ‘Rational Goal Model’ quadrant is also influential. The State,

however, has mostly retained control over education funding, allowing it to steer and shape the context for rational action (Keep, 2006).

What now follows provides a brief organising overview of FE policy history, from Incorporation to the election of the Conservative Minority Government in 2017 and slightly beyond. The overview provides a platform from which to better understand the effects and nature of current policy as it is 'iteratively refracted' (Ball, Maguire and Braun, 2012) and 'elaborated upon' (Clarke and Newman, 1997) in the case study college which will be the subject of the primary research. The overview is separated into four phases.

FE Policy: historical overview – four phases (1993-2017)

Phase 1: Incorporation – 1997 (Conservative Government)

Key to the marketisation of the Sector in this period (Lucas, 2004b), in fact key to the emerging influence of all three of Ball's (2003) policy technologies, was the 1994 FEFC national funding model. The model responded to the 1993 Audit Commission report 'Unfinished Business' which found uneven levels of funding at different colleges and no correlation between the amount spent and success rates (Lucas, 2004b; Hodgson, Bailey and Lucas, 2015). The FEFC's response was to introduce funding 'convergence' and tie funding to the learner.

If a college had been above the funding average prior to the convergence process it needed to expand to retain income by 'competing for business'. Tying funding to learners involved tracking them across their learning journey and releasing income at strategic points. Prior to Incorporation, funding had mostly been linked to initial enrolments only (Smithers and Robinson, 2000; Panchamia, 2013). Tracking was linked to tariffs and units of activity requiring tight, centrally controlled, auditing procedures to be introduced. This led to a growth in franchising (private training providers could deliver units more cheaply and flexibly) and of 'unit entrepreneurs' (Smithers and Robinson, 2000, p. 8), managers adept at extracting maximum 'yield' from student enrolment. These 'efficiencies' were not always aligned with students' best interests (see Lucas, 2004b) and are indicative of Ball's (2008, p. 51) concern that neo-liberal reforms in education would, "involve the subordination of moral obligations to economic ones".

The drive to become more efficient had ramifications for staff relations: the existing national 'Silver Book' contractual arrangements were gradually replaced, aided by Government warnings that funding would otherwise be withheld (Shain and Gleeson,

1999). The new contracts were negotiated locally but have been summarised as representing: “reduced vacation time, increased teaching hours, no limit on teaching and lower pay ...” (Shain and Gleeson, 1999, p. 450). Unsurprisingly, Taubman (2000, p. 82) describes negotiations as antagonistic, producing an industrial relations’, “narrative of almost unrelieved misery”.

By 1997, and the arrival of a new Labour Government, Smithers and Robinson (2000) report that over a quarter of colleges were considered financially weak by the FEFC. This situation was an odd case of ‘organisational failure’ since it was a direct consequence of Treasury reluctance to fund the expansion, student numbers up by a third (Smithers and Robinson, 2000, p. 9), which policy had produced (McClure, 2000; Lucas, 2004b).

Phase 2: 1997 – 2010 (Labour Government)

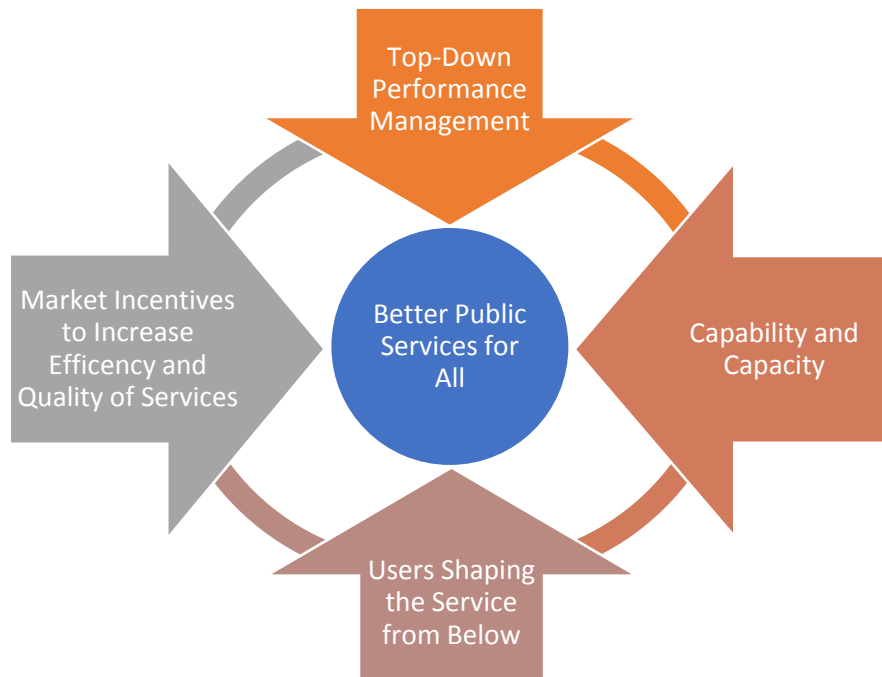
Labour’s politics was a different shade but it continued the neo-liberal approach (Fisher and Simmons, 2012; Hodgson and Spours, 2015). Hall (2005, p. 320) summed it up as follows: “New Labour has adapted to neo-liberal terrain – *but in a significant and distinctive way*”. This involved a ‘double-shuffle’ (Hall, 2005) whereby subordinate social-democratic policies, such as widening participation (Kennedy, 1997), were added to the dominant neo-liberal agenda. Keep (2006, p. 60) made a similar point: seeing in ‘New’ Labour familiar ‘ideological assumptions’ but more, “willingness ... to load additional social inclusion and social equity expectations onto E&T [Education and Training]”.

The new Government ‘pledged’ to abide by existing spending limits for its first two years in office (Smithers and Robinson, 2000; Lucas, 2004b). However, as early as 1999, an extra £256 million had been made available to extend student participation (Smithers and Robinson, 2000, p. 200) and funding continued to rise dramatically, with Coffield reporting in 2007 that funding for FE had increased by forty-eight per cent since 1997.

A key Labour initiative during this phase involved, in April 2001, replacing the FEFC with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and its forty-seven local councils (LLSCs). Somewhat ironically, given that Incorporation had been partly devised to release colleges from ‘sclerotic’ structures, the LSC was deemed a necessary corrective to, “too much duplication, confusion and bureaucracy in the system” (DfEE, 1999, p. 21). It is possible to see elements of Newman’s (2001) ‘Self Governance’ model in the attempt, using LLSCs, to devolve decision-making to local partnerships although, in reality, policy remained dominated by central targets (Panchamia, 2013).

This ongoing policy flux was fuelled by a persistent discourse of dissatisfaction with FE provision which often sets the tone for policy-making in the Sector and is expressed through: “endless reform of the E&T [Education and Training] offer ... harsher inspection and greater competition as a means of exerting pressure on providers” (Keep, 2012, pp. 367-368).

This desire to exert pressure is neatly illustrated by the reform model issued by the Prime Minister’s Strategy Unit (PMSU) in 2006, as seen in *Figure 2* below.



(*Figure 2: Government model of public service reform – simplified version (Coffield et al., 2008, p. 25)*)

Coffield (2007) adapts the model by placing FE staff in the centre, to emphasise the pressure the workforce is subject to. Since the centre of the diagram offers no feedback channel into the surrounding processes of reform, Coffield’s further point is that the workforce’s, “experiences, concerns and innovative ideas are conspicuously absent from the model, which is a closed system” (Coffield, 2007, p. 18).

Hall (2005) shares these disenfranchisement concerns, describing public sector workers as, “deeply excluded as partners in the drive to improve the services they actually deliver – the objects but never the subjects of reform” (Hall, 2005, p. 325; see also: Newman, 2001, p. 56). As *Figure 1* (Newman, 2001) indicates, there are other approaches available which could give voice to the workforce: the ‘Open Systems’ governance quadrant, for instance, emphasises interdependence, offering a more fluid environment for feedback.

Despite these 'top-down' difficulties the LSC delivered a number of the improvements it had been tasked with. Coffield et al., (2008, p. 13), for instance, draw attention to the fact that success rates had 'risen steadily' to seventy-seven per cent by 2005/06. They would continue to rise for the remaining period of Labour Government and beyond (Perry and Davies, 2015, p. 60).

Keep's (2006) point, however, is that rising success rates will not release the Sector from a 'deficit model' in the eyes of policy-makers since they do not produce the more highly productive economic model desired. For Keep, this is due to significant structural weaknesses beyond the Sector's control. Keep and Mayhew (2014, p. 773) suggest, for example, that a low skills/low wage economy awaits many FE students rather than the high skills knowledge economy evoked by politicians (see also: James, Guile and Unwin, 2013; Lupton, Unwin and Thomson, 2015). Avis's (2007, p. 122) concern is that, therefore, the FE curriculum runs the risk of preparing students for occupational structures which are, "marked by iterative patterns of inequality" (see also: Simmons, 2010). This has worrying implications for students, of course, but also for the professional identities and sense of efficacy of the FE lecturers and managers involved in the process (James, 2017).

Phase 3: 2010 – 2015 (Coalition Government)

Hodgson, Bailey and Lucas (2015, p. 17) characterise this phase with the title, 'Austerity and deregulation'. It is a reminder of the 'efficiencies' associated with the FEFC in the 1990s and of the 'let 100 flowers bloom' type rhetoric at the point of Incorporation (Nash and Jones, 2015). The results were similar: much less freedom than promised and crippling financial debts for many colleges.

With regards to austerity, the Coalition responded to the continuing effects of the 2008 financial crisis by imposing a series of sharp budget cuts in its first Comprehensive Spending Review. The adult education budget, for example, between 2011-12 and 2014-15, was reduced by twenty-five per cent (Keep, 2014, p. 3; Foster, 2017, p. 6).

Austerity measures placed strain on colleges' ability to maintain curriculum range and quality. This was confirmed by Ofsted's 2014/15 annual review: "In one year, general FE colleges lost almost 267,000 learners nationwide as their funding streams reduced. Many colleges are under enormous financial pressure" (Ofsted, 2015, p. 16). The main union for the Sector, the University and College Union (UCU), reported that FE staff had subsequently, "suffered real pay cuts totalling more than 17% over the last five years" (UCU, 2015, p. 1), and there was a, "declining ability to recruit and retain teaching and support staff" (UCU, 2015, p. 2).

That deregulation would also be a significant policy driver in the Coalition's approach to FE was made clear in a speech made by John Hayes, then Minister of State with responsibility for Further Education, a few months after coming to power:

I know there is immense human capital in the sector. Yet the last Government infantilised FE. It directed, micro-managed and encumbered FE. It's time to treat you as grown-ups. To set you free. Free from the technocrats; from full utilitarianism; from the stifling bureaucracy.

(BIS, 2010b, unpaginated)

Ball (2008, p. 43) is sceptical of such 'freedoms' in a neo-liberal context, describing them as, "set within the restraints and requirements of 'performance' and 'profitability'". Furthermore, the idea of being set free was undermined by a series of centrally driven reviews which sought to re-shape the FE curriculum. These included: the Wolf Review (2011); the Richard Review (2012); and the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning (CAVTL, 2013).

Wolf (2011) was very critical of much 14-19 vocational provision finding, for example, that many of the lower level qualifications brought negative returns in the labour market. Michael Gove, then Secretary of State for Education, wrote in the Review's foreword: "young people are being deceived and ... this is not just unacceptable but morally wrong" (Gove, 2011, p. 4). The Review led to significant and ongoing changes in the vocational curriculum.

The Richard Review (2012) was charged with apprenticeship reform. The Coalition made apprenticeship growth a key ambition very early on, declaring that: "apprenticeships are at the heart of the system that we will build" (BIS, 2010a, p. 7), and setting a target of 200,000 starts annually. As Keep and Relly (2016, p. 26) point out, however: ninety per cent of employers were not offering apprenticeships, suggesting the Government was looking to meet a demand which did not exist. This separation of policy from context was compounded by colleges being marginalised in the discourse which surrounded apprenticeships. The Government guidelines (BIS, 2015a) on the new apprenticeship standards, for instance: "address employers as the only readers of the document" (Fuller and Unwin, 2016, p. 16).

CAVTL, by comparison, stands out as an unusual central policy document (Stanton, Morris and Norrington, 2015) in that it considers the role of FE practitioners in the reform process. The Commission concluded that excellent vocational education and training contained four key characteristics (CAVTL, 2013, p. 9): a 'clear line of sight' to work; delivery by 'dual professionals'; industry standard facilities; and progression to higher levels. The reference to dual professionalism presents vocational lecturer expertise as being two-pronged: pedagogical and occupational. CAVTL was notably

confident that, given the right circumstances, there was capacity in the Sector to provide excellence on both fronts. This would involve what was termed a 'two-way street' whereby, instead of positioning the employer as customer, provision was to emerge from 'genuine' collaboration and partnerships. Employers would join curriculum panels and come into colleges to teach, whilst lecturers travelled in the opposite direction.

CAVTL did not mark a permanent shift in policy tone and address. In the month following CAVTL, the policy paper, *Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills* (BIS, 2013) was published; it declared that, "high quality is best achieved by strong accountable leadership working in partnership with learners, employers and their communities" (BIS, 2013, p. 11). Lecturers had again disappeared from view. Finlay et al. (2007) suggest this 'deficit' can be explained by the 'idealized' approach taken to the agency of employers and learners.

Phase 4: 2015 – 2017 (Conservative Government)

Whilst the Conservative party formed a majority government in May 2015 there was no paradigm shift in approach to policy. For example, the 'Fixing the foundations' Treasury Paper (BIS, 2015b) confirmed the commitment to apprenticeship growth, pledging to achieve three million apprenticeship starts by 2020, despite familiar warnings that quantity would win out over quality (see: Wolf, 2015; Smithers, 2016).

'Fixing the foundations', however, did contain one notable policy departure: it announced there would be a national apprenticeship levy for large employers from March 2017. Such centrally imposed initiatives sit uneasily with other policy strands of this period, including devolving the Adult Education Budget and responsibility for Adult and Community Learning (Spours et al., 2017). Again, it is possible to see the dynamic oppositional pulls of Newman's (2001) governance matrix, with clear oscillations occurring along the centralisation/decentralisation axis.

Such tensions are also present in the Area-Based Review (ABR) process, a *centrally* driven initiative (announced in July 2015) looking to encourage *local* and *regional* collaboration (Spours et al., 2018). ABRs were also intended to be a rationalisation device. Whilst the Spending Review settlement of 2015 did not continue the cuts for adult learning (Foster, 2017), given the extent of the reductions up to that point, this was unlikely to ameliorate the financial distress colleges were reporting. The ABR solution was a, "move towards fewer, often larger, more resilient and efficient providers" (BIS, 2015c, p. 3). In this drive for more efficiency, Nick Boles, then Minister for Skills, made the following point: "Already the reviews have identified that there are

considerable differences in efficiency across the FE sector, and scope for further education to be delivered which is both higher quality and lower cost” (BIS, 2015d: p. 2). It is a strikingly familiar call for cost convergence and ‘more for less’ (see Phase One of this historical overview).

The Government further hoped that ABRs would create: “genuine centres of expertise, able to support progression up to a high level in professional and technical disciplines while also supporting institutions that achieve excellence in teaching essential basic skills ...” (BIS, 2015c, p. 3). This point is reminiscent of the Dual Mandate for Adult Vocational Education publication brought out by the Coalition in March 2015. Mandate One was to provide vocational education which articulated with employer demand, particularly at the higher levels. Mandate Two was linked to the provision of ‘second chances’. The two mandates echo Hall’s (2005) double-shuffle point when referring to Labour’s policy approach (1997-2010), identifiable in several key policy documents of the period (the 2005 Foster Report, for example).

A significant concern of the Dual Mandate paper was that Mandate One had been progressively eroded, meaning: “the FE system had not delivered the skills that the modern economy needs” (BIS, 2015e: p. 17). This same Paper announced the introduction of National Colleges, to be employer led and linked to key technological disciplines. Whilst it was conceded that some FE Colleges may contribute, there was a sense that policy direction was seeking to marginalise the role of colleges, confining it mostly to the lower status second mandate. Bailey and Unwin (2014) consider such marginalisation (see also: Young, 2004) to be a common refrain in the FE policy cycle, citing Raggatt and Williams’s (1999) view that National Vocational Qualifications had initially been designed to be entirely work-based in order to bypass the FE sector.

Alongside these major changes there is also, once again, a significant reform of vocational qualifications underway, prompted by the Sainsbury Review (2016) proposal that fifteen technical routes (T-Levels) be created at Level 3. This is a move away from the binary ‘HE or apprenticeship’ model which the Conservatives had promulgated in the run-up to the 2015 election (Fletcher, 2017).

The streamlining of the vocational offer to fifteen routes is the latest attempt to simplify provision which, despite reductions in approved qualifications since the Coalition reforms, is still referred to as a ‘jungle’ (Milburn, 2016, p. 40). This reference picks up on the ‘jungle of vocational qualifications’ complaint put forward by policy-makers in the 1980s (Wolf, 2011, p. 57).

FE policy: historical phases – a summary

Raffe (2015, p. 152) bemoans, “the failure to learn from the experience of previous [FE] reform attempts”. For many in the literature, this failure can be attributed to the accelerating politicisation of FE over the last few decades (for example: Keep, 2006; Raffe and Spours, 2007; Wolf, 2011). Such impatient ‘politicised busyness’, markedly present across all policy phases, has frequently meant that policies are introduced too quickly and then not given long enough to mature ‘on the ground’. This lack of deliberation can mean that new policies interact with the raft of existing policies in unintended ways (Wolf, 2011), leading to calls for more policy by way of remedy, and so the ‘torrent’ continues. Keep’s (2006) further point is that the impatient dissatisfaction of successive governments with the FE Sector is often misguided, concentrating on the supply of skills (rising achievement rates, for example) rather than weak employer demand when considering ‘fixes’ to the economy.

Policy learning failures have been exacerbated by the point that the FE workforce, traduced by neo-liberal technologies (Ball, 2003), has had little say in formulating policy and is often invisible in policy texts (Keep, 2006; Coffield, 2007). Coffield (2015, p. 3), responding to the 2015 Area Review consultation paper, noted this continuing exclusion: “nowhere in the paper is there even a mention of the 200,000 tutors who are the heart and soul of the system”.

Using Newman’s (2001) governance matrix (see *Figure 1*) to interpret the policy environment has provided consistent confirmation of the top-down nature of FE policy. The hierarchical and rational goal quadrants, both of which cleave towards centralisation, have dominated. This is despite much of the literature arguing, even if indirectly, for the remaining two quadrants in Newman’s (2001) matrix to assume a stronger presence and provide space for FE voices. As it stands, Hall’s (2005) ‘objects of reform’ concept holds sway. This has had a deleterious effect on the FE profession, undermining claims made for its expertise, agency and status (see Augar, 2019), and weakening its capacity to align its work with surrounding stakeholders. These issues will be explored more fully in the next section.

Literature review: the FE profession

Introduction of terms

This section takes the view that the concept of ‘profession’, although contested (Hoyle and John, 1995; Robson, 2006; Crook, 2008), can be used as a powerful organising

tool by which to explore and lay the basis for a better understanding and evaluation of the practice of the FE workforce (lecturers and different levels of management).

The terms used in association with 'profession' are interpreted differently in the literature (Crook, 2008; Evans, 2008). The definitions used here are informed by Hoyle and John (1995) and then Hoyle (2008). Taking *professionalisation* first: this is described by Hoyle and John (1995, p. 16) as having two strands. The first strand, termed the 'institutional component', is summed up as a profession seeking to secure and develop the following: "strong boundary, academic credentials, a university connection, a self-governing professional body, practitioner autonomy, a code of ethics and so forth" (Hoyle, 2008, pp. 287-288). The second strand is concerned with the skills and knowledge of practitioners. Hoyle (2008) was later to add 'commitment' to the second strand and to name it as the 'service component'. Those practitioners considered to be acting with *professionalism* (Hoyle and John, 1995, p. 16) were those exhibiting high levels of knowledge, skills and commitment. Hoyle (2008) later 'abandoned' the use of *professionalism* and reverted to *professionalisation* when considering the service strand. Some have retained the term: Evans (2008, p. 26), for example, considers *professionalisation* to be: "the 'plural' of individuals' *professionalism*".

Hoyle (2008) also considers what might be understood by the term '*professional*'. On one level it refers to the activities practitioners may carry out expertly in the second strand of professionalism (utilising high levels of skill, knowledge and commitment). On another level, the term carries connotations of efficiency. As Hoyle points out, managers and lecturers may have conflicting views on what being efficient in a professional context might entail (see also: Randle and Brady, 1997; Ellis et al., 2017). Coffield (2014) plays on this tension by suggesting that the way to 'get ahead' in FE is to manage data well rather than become an outstanding lecturer (see also: Plowright and Barr, 2012).

Professionalisation in FE: policy overview

This brief policy overview presents the 'flux' which has existed in the 'institutional component' of FE professionalisation (Hoyle, 2008). This flux is unsurprising given the turmoil associated with other policy areas.

Until 2001 there was no requirement for FE lecturers to train to teach. At that point, the newly created (1999) Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO) standards were used to underpin Initial Teacher Education (ITE) qualifications and most new appointees were required to enrol. There was dissatisfaction with the awards from the start (see Ofsted, 2003; Lucas, 2004b), leading to new qualifications and new

standards by 2007. The 2007 awards were part of a wider restructuring: policy also compelled lecturers to join a professional body, the Institute for Learning (IfL), and to log CPD hours. At the same time, the Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS) and Licence to Practise processes were confirmed. These required lecturers to demonstrate continuing professional good standing post-qualification. Orr (2008) was critical of the top-down nature of the reforms, lamenting that: “the government has invented a professionalism” for FE lecturers (see also: Dennis, 2015). Apple (2004) argues that this has serious repercussions, taking the view that professionalisation which does not emerge from democratic roots is based on conditions of ‘thin’ as opposed to ‘thick’ morality.

The Coalition Government backed Lingfield Review of 2012 sympathised, criticising Labour’s attempt, “to impose by statute a form of professionalism” (Lingfield, 2012a: p. 2). Lingfield confirmed the cessation of funding for the IfL and removed the 2007 requirements for new teachers in the Sector to undergo ITE. The duties to log CPD hours and to apply for and maintain QTLS were also dropped. Although Lingfield claimed deregulation was based on extensive consultation, it ignored Government sponsored research (BIS, 2012) which supported ongoing regulation. Furthermore, as Hoyle (2008, p. 296) states, “the professionalization project has been very much a matter of attaining, retaining and enhancing status”, and the *legal* status a profession acquires, undermined for FE by Lingfield, is an important component of this process.

With existing professional structures swept away the Coalition arranged for a new set of ‘voluntary’ qualifications, a new set of standards and the emergence in 2013 of the Education and Training Foundation (ETF), a quango which relies on central funding to support the FE workforce. Groves’s (2015) view is that the ETF is employer-led (see also: Atkins and Tummons, 2017), largely confirmed by the profile of the first nominated board members in 2013 (ETF, 2013). The Society for Education (SET) was formed in 2014 and is the professional membership arm of the ETF. Its membership figures are given as fifteen thousand (ETF, 2017, p. 8); the IfL reported membership figures of two-hundred thousand at its height (IfL, 2010; Taubman, 2015).

Professionalism: anchoring concepts

Whilst recognising the weaknesses of the criteria approach to defining occupations, Hoyle and John (1995) identify three which recur frequently in the literature and thus can serve as ‘anchoring concepts’ in an analysis of teaching as a profession. These criteria, described by Hoyle and John (1995, p. 15) as, “crucial matters for *education*”, are: knowledge, autonomy and responsibility. Robson (2006, p. 7) uses the same

'three constituent ideas' in her discussion of teacher professionalism. The chapter's next section is organised into three parts, using each of the anchoring criterion to help structure an examination of the difficulties, dilemmas and opportunities which prevail inside the FE profession.

Professionalism: knowledge

Knowledge: opening issues

Classically, this means specialist knowledge, available to the professional only after extended study, and usually associated with the University sector (Hoyle and John, 1995). Distinctions are drawn between technical and practical knowledge (Eraut, 1994; Hoyle and John, 1995), with the former being abstract, codified, whilst the latter is derived from practice. Hoyle and John's (1995, p. 48) position, citing Bernstein (1971), is that: "professional knowledge and professional practice are weakened when the boundaries between them are wide".

For Freidson (2001, p. 83), a 'prerequisite' to being recognised as a profession is the ability to use 'a complex body' of formal knowledge (Hoyle and John's 'technical knowledge'). Freidson emphasises that this ability must be recognised by the State, otherwise a profession risks its work being controlled by markets (employers and learners), managers (the bureaucracy) or both. This is particularly telling for (deregulated) FE professionals considering the dominant policy technology of managerialism and their well charted lack of control over FE policy.

Hoyle and John (1995) perceive a vulnerability in the teaching profession with regards to technical knowledge, based on practitioner disinterest (see also: Sachs, 2003; Lucas, 2004b; Lucas and Unwin, 2009). They suggest this partially stems from the traditional dominance of the knowledge as transmission metaphor which implies subject knowledge is sufficient, meaning little consideration is given to pedagogy. This 'eschewing' of theory may be a particular problem for FE (Maxwell, 2014) where many lecturers 'slip unplanned' (Gleeson and James, 2007) into teaching, and can retain much stronger identities with the occupations on which their subject expertise is based (Venables, 1967; Robson, 1998). The concept of dual professionalism, keenly supported by the IfL throughout its lifespan, can therefore be seen as an attempt to rescue pedagogy for the FE profession.

Orr and Robinson's (2013) consideration of vocational education, however, suggests ongoing difficulties in establishing 'dual' status. They agree with Lucas, Spencer and Claxton (2012) that, "the evidence suggests that serious consideration of pedagogy is

largely missing in vocational education and vocational learners are the losers as a result of this omission” (Orr and Robinson, 2013, p. 6).

ITE programmes and CPD can work to address difficulties around technical and practical knowledge whilst simultaneously supporting the liturgy of policy: improvement in the quality of provision. However, both ITE and CPD encounter notable obstacles in a sector afflicted by intensification and struggles for professional identity (Clow, 2001; Jephcote and Salisbury, 2009; Thompson, 2018).

Knowledge: initial teacher education (ITE)

Deregulation of ITE is an obvious example of the struggles around professional identity in FE but the structure of and setting for ITE programmes is also concerning. Freidson (2001, p. 92) posits that those delivering initial training programmes should be simultaneously involved in research. Thompson (2014), however, using the IfL as his source, reports that almost ninety per cent of ITE trainees are ‘in-service’ (see also: Lahiff, 2015). Most ITE, therefore, is delivered by FE lecturers, probably working in difficult conditions, and for whom ITE may be a small fraction of their timetable. This produces prohibitive contexts for knowledge creation. Dennis et al. (2016, p. 11), for instance, found that for ITE lecturers in FE: “There is no meaningful institutional space for them to acquaint themselves with emerging policy and research ...”.

Running initial qualifications in such difficult contexts presents other drawbacks. Lucas and Nasta’s (2010, p. 453) research found, “a fragmented and impoverished [FE] professional culture, which often has a weak work-based culture of supporting trainees ...”. Maxwell’s (2014, p. 384) summary of the neophyte response is that: “trainees adopt a productive worker rather than trainee identity” (see also: Lucas and Unwin, 2009), meaning capacity does not expand as it should and there is little room to forge ‘collective competence’ (Maxwell, 2010, citing Boreham, 2004).

Further difficulties regarding theory stem from ITE programme design. Harkin (2005, p. 172) found that courses, “offer only fragments of theory rather than systematic bodies of knowledge”. This led to a poor grasp of codified knowledge and resonates with my own experience of delivering an ITE in-service programme in which the module covering theories of learning and communication is covered in five three-hour sessions. This situation is made more concerning when one considers Eraut’s (1994, p. 11) point that there is frequently no continuity between initial professional programmes and CPD, meaning the five sessions referred to above may be the only exposure trainees ever have to concepts which should be integral to maturation of practice.

Professional standards can guard against such fragmentation by underpinning initial qualifications and acting as continuing evaluative benchmarks (Tummons, 2014). However, Lucas (2013) suggests that policy-makers 'over-estimate' the impact standards can have. Tummons's (2014) research into how the 2006 LLUK standards influenced an ITE course, supports this view, finding that both trainers and trainees, "do not challenge or critique them; nor do they read and reflect on them – they simply ignore them" (Tummons, 2014, p. 40).

Knowledge: continuing professional development (CPD)

Sachs (2003, p. 29) sums up the importance of continuing to develop professional practice as follows:

one of the hallmarks of being identified externally as a professional is to continue learning throughout a career, deepening knowledge, skill judgement, staying abreast of important developments in the field and experimenting with innovations that promise improvement in practice.

The paradox for Sachs is that teaching is 'not a learning profession'. This is linked to the reluctance to engage with theory, but Sachs also stresses that the profession's learning needs are 'overlooked'. Lucas and Nasta (2010, p. 447) take a stronger view: "many college workplaces present a barrier to professional development" (see also: Maxwell, 2014; Hillier and Gregson, 2015). This may mean CPD is absent or takes the form described as producing a 'constrained extended professionalism' (Hoyle, 2008): CPD is more prevalent but agendas are set by managers and privilege bureaucratic procedures.

Lawson (2011) reported that CPD was frequently perceived as irrelevant to lecturers' practice, with organisations paying little heed to their existing expertise and knowledge: a form of infantilization (see also: Brown and Duguid, 1991). The participants in Lawson's (2011) research also complained that too much CPD was of the 'one-off transmission variety' (see also: Eraut, 1994) despite lecturers reporting that, "sustained hands-on CPD that deployed active modes of learning and was linked to classroom practice was the most effective model" (Lawson, 2011, p. 319). This 'sustained hands-on' approach has long been advocated in the literature (Joyce and Showers, 1980; Eraut, 1994; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012); that it is still considered atypical (Timperley et al., 2007; Broad, 2015) is indicative of a gap between theory and practice in the profession.

Professionalism: autonomy

This criterion is, “central to the idea of a profession” (Hoyle and John, 1995, p. 77), due to the complex and unpredictable contexts in which professionals typically work. Such unpredictability means discretionary judgement is essential.

Two key contexts for autonomy

Professional practice for lecturers can be located in two main contexts: the classroom and then the college as an organisation (Hoyle and John, 1995). Hargreaves (2008) uses the concept of ‘loose and tight coupling’ (of control and autonomy) to help understand practice in each context. Hargreaves (2008, p. 251) suggests that:

Traditionally, in England, the professional autonomy of teachers meant that classrooms were loosely-coupled, for what went on there hinged on the judgement of the teacher and in any event was usually weakly monitored by senior management.

This evokes Black and Wiliam’s (1998) research which referred to the classroom as a ‘black box’ since what occurred there was often ‘insulated’, even, as Hargreaves (2008) points out, from fellow professionals. This degree of autonomy may not be beneficial and can lead to isolation. It has also been reined in by managerial processes including: high stakes observation regimes (O’Leary, 2013); regular learning walks; student surveys; and centrally devised schemes of work.

However, as Hoyle and John (1995) explain, the classroom setting remains too uncertain and contextual to manage closely. Schön’s (1983) theory of ‘reflection-in-action’ echoes this, suggesting that teachers are required to respond in skilled, tacit ways to many ‘unusual’ classroom episodes and this ‘professional artistry’ cannot be legislated for. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) refer to such skilled behaviour as ‘decisional capital’, the ability to judge well when the rules are unclear.

With regards to autonomy within the wider College context, most post-Incorporation organisations would be described as ‘tightly coupled’ due to their hierarchical, managerial nature. ‘Tightly coupled’ organisations provide little room for most in the workforce to contribute to work process decisions and policies (see also: Maynard and Martinez, 2002). Lunt (2008: p. 89) suggests this is because hierarchical models make the ‘acknowledgement of mutual expertise’ less likely, producing, as Whitty (2006) warns, multiple tiers of management which fracture the workforce and reduce ‘mutual understanding’ (UCU, 2013). Page (2013), for example, reports a ‘terrible cynicism’ in FE middle managers towards the management levels above them, including a sense that their value bases were quite separate, that senior managers were ‘hopelessly out of touch’.

The exclusion of large tracts of the workforce from organisational decision-making, on top of its invisibility in national policy texts, raises the spectre of the technician professional,

working to directives established elsewhere and with little opportunity to engage in negotiation over the parameters and criteria within which they work or the indices which are appropriate for evaluating their practice.

(Mahony and Hextall, 1997, quoted in Ozga, 2000, p. 24)

This points back to the closed system illustrated in *Figure 2*. It is also a reminder of the 'objects of reform' position (Hall, 2005) and conjures up Avis's (2007) concerns regarding 'ever more compliant' workforces.

Ozga (2000) predicted that a restricted 'technician' style existence would lead to low morale, high levels of stress and difficulties in recruitment and retention. This chimes disturbingly with the UCU (2015) report referred to earlier. It also aligns with the UCU Stress Survey of 2014 which reported that eighty-seven per cent of FE respondents considered their job to be stressful. The survey used the following definition of stress: a "harmful reaction to undue pressures and demands related to the job role" (Kinman and Wray, 2014, p. 5).

Ultimately, Hoyle and John's (1995, p. 102) view is that, "a loosely coupled system continues to offer the best scope for maximising the professionalism of teachers". Achieving the balance required in a neo-liberal policy environment is fraught with difficulties, compounded by the point that lecturers will bring a variety of individual biographies to the task (Billett, 2011). Additionally, there is the risk of 'contrived collegiality' (Hoyle and John, 1995; Fuller and Unwin, 2006; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012), whereby the workforce is herded together for 'collaborative events' which, "appear contrived, grafted on, perched precariously (and often temporarily) on the margin of real work" (Little, 1990, quoted in Hoyle and John, 1995, p. 98).

Finding space for autonomy

As the review of policy phases has shown, FE colleges deal with rafts of external and then internal policy directives as policy is 'interpreted' and 'translated' (Ball, Maguire and Braun, 2012). This leads to colleges becoming 'forgetful organisations' (Page, 2015, p. 124) where it is impossible to keep track of the multiple 'principal-agent' (Olssen and Peters, 2005) requests made of those working at lower levels in the hierarchy. This, married to the 'black box' principle (Black and William, 1998), leaves room for agency, space where lecturers, as well as different levels of management, can be seen to be: "prioritizing those aspects that they find personally meaningful and downplaying those aspects which are not" (Page, 2015, p. 125). The key here, for

Page, is that such fashioning is not a simple rejection of power but a form of 'academic citizenship' since it is agency designed to forge more positive professional identities in the process of protecting the interests of learners where they would otherwise be damaged. Wallace and Hoyle (2005) describe similar actions as 'principled infidelity', a form of mediation at the point where policy meets practice and professional lives (see also: the concepts of 'noncanonical practice' (Brown and Duguid, 1991) and 'strategic compliance' (Shain and Gleeson, 1999)). 'Academic citizenship' is at heart, then, an ethical response and points forward to the concept of 'responsibility' which will be addressed in the next section.

Professionalism: responsibility

Hoyle and John (1995) use 'responsibility' rather than 'accountability' for this third key criterion, considering it to be a 'broader principle' (see also: Biesta, 2010). Adhering to procedures of accountability is, for the most part, the responsible thing to do but, "Responsibility entails a more voluntaristic commitment to a set of principles governing good practice" (Hoyle and John, 1995, p. 104). If a profession is to work in loosely coupled contexts then its practitioners must use autonomy responsibly. Similarly, any 'infidelity' must be 'principled'.

This raises issues of trust, with Freidson (2001, p. 34) suggesting that discretion is central to his ideal-typical professional model since:

it implies being trusted, being committed, even being morally involved in one's work. As the assumption is made that failure in work is not due to wilful neglect, externally imposed rules governing work are minimized.

This position is at odds with the neo-liberal organisation of work in many FE colleges. Lunt (2008, p. 85), citing O'Neill (2002), posits that the professions in general may be experiencing a 'crisis of trust'. Certainly, some policy rhetoric suggests that the FE Sector has lost its moral compass. Gove's comments in the foreword to the Wolf Review (2011), referred to earlier, are a case in point, as is the following 2012 statement, made by the then Chief Inspector of Ofsted, Sir Michael Wilshaw: "The Learning and Skills Sector needs reorientation towards a moral determination to provide high quality and relevant provision" (Ofsted, 2012, p. 15). More troubling, although to be expected in the 'survivalist' culture engendered by marketization (Ball, 2003), there are many accounts from the Sector itself which flag up concerning behaviour. Bathmaker and Avis (2005), for example, capture ITE trainees' shock in the face of inappropriate student recruitment practices and a 'pass at all costs' culture.

A crucial aspect of 'responsibility' for Hoyle and John (1995), involves negotiating the expansion of role expectations, the sense that the work is never done (see also: Ball,

2003; Gleeson and James, 2007; Page, 2013). Sachs (2003) also addresses this issue, finding that, whilst the literature is awash with narratives revealing teachers' commitment to their students, this is: "at once a source of strength and a characteristic which renders them vulnerable to exploitation" (Sachs, 2003, p. 49). James (2017) suggests it is a form of 'self-exploitation'. Bathmaker and Avis (2013) refer to this commitment as 'personal professionalism', worrying that its 'individual properties' are isolating, making it difficult to withstand the managerial nature of 'organisational professionalism'. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012, p. 102) also discuss the issue of professional vulnerability, deciding that, "it is not enough for teachers ... to have a heart of gold"; they are required to be 'responsibly selective' in what they attend to.

Organisational professionalism may restrict another important aspect of responsibility: the duty to 'speak out' (Lunt, 2008, p. 93) and challenge 'paternalistic authoritarianism' (Hoyle and John, 1995). Professional bodies play important roles in such principled and constructive dissent and so the current lack of an organisation which could be described as representative is concerning.

A final significant aspect of responsibility is an ongoing commitment to CPD (Hoyle and John, 1995). This extends past logging hours or 'bean counting' (Boud and Hager, 2012). It involves an 'investment of the self', with Hoyle and John (1995) describing such commitment, citing Langford (1985), as the process of moving identity from *agent for another* to *principal*, whereby a professional takes responsibility for investing purpose to actions (see also: Sachs, 2003). This process seeks to disrupt hierarchical (neo-liberal) principal-agent relationships (Olssen and Peters, 2005).

Professional models: positive ways forward

The coverage of the three anchoring criteria (knowledge, autonomy, responsibility) demonstrates that: "The struggle over appropriating an expansive and transformative model of professionalism continues to haunt the FE system" (Hillier and Gregson, 2015, p. 107). However, several models in the literature, some considered below, offer positive ways forward in remarkably common agreement. All, in terms of Newman's (2001) governance matrix (see *Figure 1*), cleave towards the self-governance and open systems models. They emphasise: permeable boundaries; interdependence; dialogue; and collaborative work.

Triple professionalism

Triple professionalism is proposed by Hodgson and Spours (2013a, 2015). Its links to other 'positive' professional models are made clear: "this new model draws on radical

interpretations of educational professionalism – democratic, activist and ecological ...” (Hodgson and Spours, 2013a, p. 16). The model encourages ‘responsible’ resistance to the more debilitating aspects of policy. Such resistance depends upon ‘reaching out’ to ‘make connections’. This emphasis on connections is the third arm, added to ‘dual’ professionalism for the purposes of the ‘triple’ model. These connections must be forged internally and externally, although, “The new model would, first of all, have to maximise professional participation within the college itself so that its working culture became ‘expansive’ rather than ‘restrictive’” (Hodgson and Spours, 2013a, pp. 16-17). The quote reveals the influence on the model of Fuller and Unwin’s (2003, 2004, 2006) workplace learning framework.

Amidst the opportunities which triple professionalism represents is the threat of debilitating job expansion. This threat is relevant to all of the ‘way forward’ models considered in this section, accentuating the point that expansive professional participation requires sensitive integration. Otherwise, in Avis’s (2009, 2010a, 2010b) view, the workforce simply assumes the vestiges of a more efficiently exploited commodity: a reminder that the FE workplace is the site of a labour exchange, ‘sketched out on capitalist terrain’ (Avis, 2010b).

Activist professionalism

This model is associated with Sachs (2003). It has four key elements which, working together, create a composite fifth element: *activism*. Activism produces a transformative (expansive) identity whereby educators re-establish control of their profession’s ‘moral purpose’ in the face of ‘enervating’ new public management. Four complementary elements produce this transformation: *learning*, *participation*, *collaboration* and *cooperation*. Sachs cites Wenger (1998) to stress that professional *learning* informs collective political resistance. Sach’s approach to *participation* articulates with Fuller and Unwin’s (2003, 2004, 2006) work on expansive workplace settings in advocating a restructuring of education organisations so that the full range of workforce expertise can be drawn upon. Sachs’s point is that enhanced agency will permit new solutions to emerge, perhaps because it strengthens dialectical processes (see also: Takeuchi and Nonaka, 2004; Engeström, 2009).

Collaboration stresses the development of mutuality, with Sachs suggesting the power relations present when ‘interested parties’ come together need to be examined and unravelled if decision-making is to be genuinely collaborative. *Cooperation*, in Sachs’s terms, does not question power relations but is nonetheless vital if practitioners are to break away from isolating work practices.

Democratic professionalism

There are many democratic features in the models dealt with above – people coming together to forge a common good through the open flow of ideas, for example. Sachs (2001, p. 157), in fact, sees an activist identity, “emerging from democratic discourses”. Several other writers make explicit reference to a democratic model. Ball (2013) advances what he describes as a ‘democratic fellowship’ in which trust is re-built between education and the community. This will, “require a new kind of teacher and a move towards forms of democratic professionalism, with an emphasis on collaborative, cooperative action” (Ball, 2013, p. 5). It also ‘requires’ a new kind of manager. Whitty (2006, 2008) calls for a democratic professionalism which makes education more of a ‘collective endeavour’ where a broader set of stakeholders has a voice (see also: Apple and Beane, 2007; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012).

Ecological professionalism

Barnett’s (2012) ecological model once more stresses ‘connections’ and democratic values, indicating that professionals are embroiled in overlapping networks, both inside and outside of the professional workplace. These connections insist that, fundamental to being a professional, is an acknowledgement of the allegiances held with other constituencies in society: there can, in fact, be ‘no alone professional’ (Barnett, 2012, p. 31).

The interdependency of different parts of the system explains the use of the term, ecological, which also serves to reference the ethical concerns arising from these connections. Barnett (2012) does not underestimate the difficulties which may occur in creating such nourishing and ethical connections, sometimes using the term ‘liquid professionalism’ to attempt to capture the art of coping with the multiple flows and dilemmas which exist within different social spaces.

The FE profession: key lessons

As Avis (2007) indicates, progressive professional models and any combination of them insist upon collaborative workplaces. They require an opening up of the workplace so that damaging norms produced by a succession of debilitating policy phases can be exposed and the workforce provided with more positive professional trajectories. Biesta’s (2010) distinction between socialization (fitting into existing norms) and subjectification (a focus on individual growth) is useful here; the latter allows for more ‘confident workplace conversations’ and a shift in professional aspirations. Ball and Olmedo (2013, p. 85) stress that it is crucial, “we think about subjectivity as a site

of struggle and resistance”, since we are always ‘becoming’, caught in the process of forging and resisting different identities.

These struggles will be informed by FE’s hierarchical settings. Senior managers, for instance, have considerable scope to be catalysts in the ‘opening up’ of FE workplaces. As the policy section has shown, colleges have been encouraged to create settings for professional work guided more by ‘economies of performance’ than ‘ecologies of practice’ (Stronach et al., 2002). Freire’s (1996) point is that such oppressive circumstances are ‘dehumanising’ for all concerned and that managers, therefore, as positive catalysts, must have ‘something of Easter’ about them: a willingness to sacrifice the power conferred upon them by hierarchical frameworks.

The literature is consistent in suggesting that colleges must reorganise themselves in order to better facilitate the idea of a ‘learning profession’ and the varied levels of participation which this requires. The next section considers approaches which analyse how workplace settings might be constructed to help accommodate this reorganisation. These approaches do not imagine that resolution involves moving ‘magically’ from one set of circumstances to another. Instead, there is a loose consensus that professional lives exist in a state of overlapping, uneven and ‘liquid’ tensions which can be negotiated more successfully but may never be fully resolved.

Literature review: workplace learning

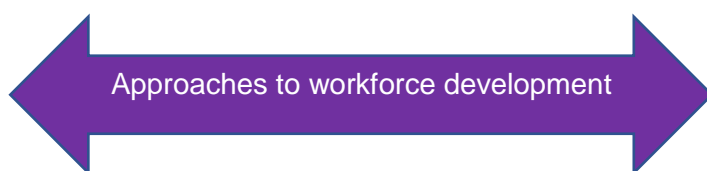
Workplace learning: introduction

The central focus of this section is an examination of Fuller and Unwin’s (2003, 2004, 2006) expansive-restrictive workplace learning model, a ‘conceptual framework’ initially developed to evaluate apprenticeships. The framework has subsequently been applied and adapted to a variety of workplaces, including secondary schools (Hodkinson and Hodkinson: 2003, 2004), FE colleges (O’Leary, 2013) and universities (Boyd, Smith and Beyaztas, 2015).

The focus on the expansive-restrictive framework provides a base from which to bring in other sources, to help trace variations in approach to workplace learning and build a richer examination of the framework itself. Issues around professionalism remain important since, as James and Gleeson (2007, p. 126) put it: “professionalism has to be understood as a fundamental feature of a learning culture ...”.

Workplace learning: expansive and restrictive learning environments

Table 1 below sets out the expansive-restrictive framework. There are several versions of the framework available since, as explained above, the criteria can be adapted to fit different contexts. The version reproduced here provides a detailed generic overview of the framework's characteristics. Fuller and Unwin's (2006, p. 39) position is: "that the nature and 'productiveness' of the workplace learning environment will largely depend on the extent to which it is underpinned by the principles of expansiveness or restrictiveness". For example: Hodkinson and Hodkinson's (2004) research, cited by Fuller and Unwin (2006, p. 52), found that, "the best and most effective teacher learning ... was fostered in expansive learning environments". It may also be that the more expansive an FE college environment is, the more likely it is to have embraced the principles of triple professionalism, democratic professionalism and so forth. This, in turn, can provide a more productive base from which to engage in policy enactments (Ball, Maguire and Braun, 2012).



EXPANSIVE	RESTRICTIVE
Participation in multiple communities of practice inside/outside the workplace	Restricted participation in multiple communities of practice
Primary community of practice has shared "participative memory": cultural inheritance of workforce development	Primary community of practice has little/no participative memory: no/little tradition of workforce development
Breadth: access to learning fostered by cross-company experiences	Narrow: access to learning restricted in terms of tasks/knowledge/location
Access to range of qualifications	Little/no access to qualifications
Planned time off the job, including for knowledge-based courses/reflection	Virtually all on the job; limited opportunities for reflection
Gradual transition to full, rounded participation	Fast: transition as quick as possible
Vision of workplace learning: progression for career	Vision of workplace learning: static for job
Organizational recognition of/support for, employees as learners	Lack of organization recognition of/support for, employees as learners
Workforce development: vehicle for aligning the goals of developing the individual/organizational capability	Workforce development: tailor individual capability to organizational need
Workforce development fosters opportunity to extend identity through boundary-crossing	Workforce development limits opportunities to extend identity: little boundary crossing experienced

Reification of “workplace curriculum” highly developed	Limited reification of “workplace curriculum”; patchy access to reificatory aspects of practice
Widely distributed skills	Polarized distribution of skills
Technical skills valued	Technical skills taken for granted
Knowledge and skills of whole workforce developed and valued	Knowledge and skills of key workers/groups developed and valued
Team-work valued	Rigid specialist roles
Cross-boundary communication encouraged	Bounded communication
Managers as facilitators of workforce/ individual development	Managers as controllers of workforce/ individual development
Chances to learn new skills/jobs	Barriers to learning new skills/jobs
Innovation important	Innovation not important
Multidimensional view of expertise	Unidimensional top-down view of expertise

(Table 1: Expansive-restrictive framework (long version); Fuller and Unwin, 2006, pp. 40-41)

As the various references to participation, access to other workers, and communities of practice might suggest, the framework builds on Lave and Wenger’s (1991) theory of situated learning. This theory uses two key concepts – legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) and communities of practice – to propose, “that learning is an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice” (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 31). LPP traces the inward learning trajectory which novices may take as they move to fuller, more mature participation in a community’s practices. As Fuller et al. (2005) explain, this describes a process of ‘becoming’ (see also: Ball and Olmedo, 2013), of taking on ‘membership identity’ within a community.

For Lave and Wenger (1991), learning relies on being ‘in-situ’, being able to, for example: interact with experts and observe their practice; observe peers; gradually build an understanding of how different components in the workplace are related. It is these relationships which forge the communities of practice. For Lave and Wenger (1991), richer learning is linked to richer opportunities for participation since their concept of how we learn shifts focus from individual cognition – learning as acquisition (Sfard, 1998) – to social practice. Beckett and Hager (2002) locate this ‘shift’ within a wider movement away from ‘standard’ to ‘emergent’ paradigms of learning. In the latter, acquisition is viewed simply as one of many dimensions of learning; more emphasis is placed on knowledge which is forged through practice and shaped by context, on tacit knowledge, on ‘learning in the world’.

Whilst Lave and Wenger’s work, as well as Wenger’s (1998) development of key principles, influences Fuller and Unwin’s (2003, 2004, 2006) model, their framework

accommodates aspects of workplace learning and of the wider 'emerging paradigm' which had remained underdeveloped in Lave and Wenger's theory. For example, there are opportunities in the framework for learning which is not 'in-situ' but which takes place in more formal off-the-job contexts. This is an acceptance of Young's (2004) point, cited by Fuller and Unwin (2006, pp. 138-139), that a weakness in the situated learning approach is:

that it conceives *all* knowledge as situated or context-specific, and fails to recognise that there are different types of knowledge, some of which are more situated than others.

Fuller (2007) also examines problematic issues linked to Lave and Wenger's 'community of practice' concept. As Fuller explains, 'community' conjures up a benign context which the cases in Lave and Wenger's (1991) research tended to sustain. It is clear that Lave and Wenger were aware communities may be cut through with damaging relations of power and Fuller (2007) quotes from their research to show this. However, Fuller's point is that the notion of 'struggle' in workplace contexts was underdeveloped, particularly since the 'enculturation' implicit in the situated process may be reproducing 'damaging norms'. Such reproduction can be seen in the difficult in-service experience of trainee teachers described previously, when considering ITE and professional knowledge. Linked to this, Fuller (2007) cites Engeström's (1994) point that learning through participation may simply involve what Engeström terms 'first order learning types' such as imitation and socialization (see also: Biesta, 2010). Fuller and Unwin (2006) are careful to include notions such as 'innovation' and 'extended identities' to help capture the possibilities for 'transformation of practice'. In Engeström's (1994) work (cited in Fuller, 2007, p. 24) such transformations involve second and third order learning types: these rely on an inquiring culture which provides for a collective approach to identifying novel solutions to contradictions and problems in the workplace. This assumes 'horizontal interactions' within organisations, an 'acknowledgement of mutual expertise' (Fuller and Unwin, 2006; Lunt, 2008), and offers a way around the hierarchical, managerial structures prevalent in FE settings. As Fuller and Unwin (2003) suggest, a vital characteristic of an expansive learning environment is the opportunity for the workforce to come together to reflect on practice and 'make sense'. Gleeson, Davies and Wheeler (2005) worry that FE lacks communities of practice precisely because this expansive characteristic is so underdeveloped, the settings too fragmentary.

Lave and Wenger have attracted further criticism for their focus on only one type of LPP trajectory: peripheral to full. Fuller (2007) shows that Wenger (1998) addressed

this by developing four further trajectories: remaining on the periphery; continuing to develop and learn after achieving full membership; crossing into multiple communities of practice; and retreating from full participation to the periphery or leaving completely. Implicit in this 'flux', as Fuller (2007) notes, is that individuals bring different dispositions (see also: Billett, 2011) with them to any community of practice and these influence the trajectories taken. Fuller suggests this shifts the emphasis with regards to identity formation, away from the structure of the community of practice, and towards the relations forged when agency and structure meet. This evokes Bourdieu's (1990) work on 'habitus' (individual predispositions) and 'field' (structured social spaces), in that agency and structure work on each other and are mutually constitutive.

Wenger (1998) proposes that, in the light of situated learning theory, what we understand by the term 'productive workforce' needs re-shaping. For Wenger, it is not using the organisation's prescribed procedures efficiently – as with a technician approach (Ozga, 2000) or slavishly following 'canonical practice' (Brown and Duguid, 1991) – but, "participating inventively in practices that can never be fully captured by organizational processes" (Wenger, 1998, p. 10; see also: Schön, 1983). Such re-shaping, however, must negotiate the tensions between agency and structure: between 'tight' and 'loose' coupling. Timperley et al. (2007, p. xxv), for example, "found little evidence to support the claim that [simply] providing teachers with time and resources is effective in promoting professional learning ...". Similarly, Felstead et al. (2011) emphasise how important job design and configuration is in establishing an expansive learning environment. Their phrase 'working to learn', for instance, draws attention to the idea that learning should not simply be seen as something bolted onto work but designed-in, integrated.

Fuller and Unwin (2006) do not underestimate the difficulties which settings will encounter in attempting to create more expansive opportunities, particularly since they feel the 'learning as acquisition' metaphor (the standard paradigm) continues to dominate. This resonates with lecturers' descriptions of CPD as 'one-off transmission events', detailed earlier in the chapter. Adopting expansive approaches will be further hampered by workplace cultures in which managerial conditions have prevailed for some time. As Crowther (2015, p. 8) suggests, FE colleges will need support to develop 'collaborative expertise': "that is, how staff share resources, debates, solutions to vocational and pedagogical matters".

Workplace learning: complementary perspectives – building on the expansive-restrictive approach

The perspectives which are now considered serve both to highlight the range of contributions to workplace learning in the literature and to allow for richer interpretations of the expansive-restrictive framework. Eraut's 2004 article on workplace learning is used as an organising text.

Eraut (2004, p. 249) is of the view that: "most workplace learning occurs on the job rather than off the job" (see also: Boud and Hager, 2012). This carries the key advantage that learning, therefore, is contextualized (situated), immediately relevant and can avoid Engeström's (2004, p. 156) concern that 'decontextualised' knowledge foists 'alien solutions' onto workplace settings. Brown and Duguid (1991) refer to such 'solutions' as 'distorting abstractions'. The risk for Eraut, with workplace learning, however, is that it is often tacit and may remain unexamined. If it is used uncritically it may simply be a poor solution which is then applied recurrently; this is first order learning in Engeström's (1994) terms. Eraut (2004, p. 255) considers such lack of criticality to be, "a common feature of situations where people are overworked or alienated", and so perhaps highly likely in FE settings. In an earlier work, Eraut (1994) suggests that if professionals are to transform practice – move towards the expansive poles in Fuller and Unwin's (2003, 2004, 2006) framework – they need time to generate new practical knowledge via 'the distillation of personal experiences'. This distillation (learning constructed through social practice) is envisaged as colleagues joining together to 'question', to 'challenge', to 'narrate', and arrive at better understandings of 'semi-digested case experiences'. Brown and Duguid (1991) advocate something very similar, describing how the interplay of different individual stories can suggest new narratives, new solutions and new ways of doing things within organisations.

Eraut describes this type of 'joining together' as a focus on *renewal*: developing a deeper understanding of what works in practice. In Nonaka's (1996) terms, the process of *renewal* 'taps' into tacit knowledge, makes it available to organisations and individuals as they look to move practice on in innovative, contextualised ways. Broad (2015, p. 3) proposes a similar approach and cites the James Report (DES, 1972) to support the view that the most effective professional learning is characterised by using 'growing maturity and experience' to 'build' understanding. This type of approach is threatened, in Eraut's view, by settings which privilege the 'new' or which, in the case of FE colleges, are forced to cope with a litany of new policy initiatives, many arriving before previous reforms have been subjected to processes of *renewal*.

Eraut (2004) proposes four types of work activity which he feels best engender regular and enriching learning opportunities. All are in sympathy with the expansive-restrictive framework's expansive characteristics and are briefly outlined below:

- Participation in group activities: this establishes opportunities to get to know people and reduces misjudgements within social relationships. Whilst Eraut did not describe this type of activity as a community of practice it has many of the features. For example: he suggests that groups are formed for particular purposes, allowing practice to be a 'joint enterprise' forged from 'mutual engagement' (Wenger 1998). Such participation encourages mutual understanding and can serve to ameliorate the contempt which different levels of the FE workforce sometimes hold for each other (see, for example: Page, 2013; 2015).
- Work alongside others: this raises issues for job design and is problematic for the teaching profession since much practice is carried out within the 'black box' (Black and William, 1998). It looks back to Lave and Wenger's (1991) research and reiterates the importance of having access to the dialogue and practice of experienced colleagues (see also: Billett, 2011).
- Take on challenging tasks (see also: Høyrup and Elkjaer, 2006): Felstead et al. (2011, p. 9) make the point that, "for some employees, workplaces pose exciting challenges which stimulate their capacity for innovation". Eraut is perhaps acknowledging here that, for many, this may not be the case. A workforce which has been 'infantilized', for instance, may not be given the responsibility and discretion required, may be denied the challenging connections of 'triple professionalism'.
- Work with clients: for the FE workforce this would include opportunities for reciprocal external boundary-crossing, implicit in CAVTL's (2013) two-way street vision and an explicit element of the expansive-restrictive framework. It would also be a feature of successful democratic professionalism (Whitty, 2006; Ball, 2013) which insists that all stakeholders are given a voice.

Underpinning the success or otherwise of these types of activity is workforce confidence and commitment (Eraut, 2004). To have the confidence and motivation to take on (and define the nature of) challenging tasks, workforces must feel that: their views are valued; they will be supported to succeed; they will have access to constructive feedback and so forth (see also: Evans and Kersh, 2004; Iredale et al., 2013). Commitment, for Eraut (2004), complements confidence and can be bolstered if the value of activities is clarified by consensus, making it more likely they will then

support the development of both the organisation and the individuals involved. This is a reminder of the expansive characteristic which stresses the importance of aligned development. Nonaka (1996, p. 19) makes a similar point when discussing workplace innovation: “The key to the process is personal commitment, the employees’ sense of identity with the enterprise and its mission”.

If the ‘whole workforce’ is to access and commit to the types of activity listed above, the power relations cutting across contexts will require attention (Sachs, 2003: Fuller, 2007). Billett (2004, p. 116) explains that:

individuals or cohorts of individuals will experience different kinds of affordances, depending on their affiliations, associations, gender, language skills, employment status and standing in the workplace.

This ‘experience’ will be informed by existing dispositions which, Billett suggests, may include resistance to adopting a learning identity in the workplace (if vocational knowledge is deemed sufficient, for example). Fuller and Unwin (2004) refer to existing workplace learning dispositions as ‘learning territories’. They suggest that expansive learning environments can break down territorialism and simultaneously challenge the notion that knowledge, particularly that which crosses boundaries, is “seen as the preserve of those on higher grades” (Fuller and Unwin, 2004, p. 137; see also: Ozga, 2000).

Bishop et al. (2006, p. 18) see the resulting fluidity as providing for a ‘learning supportive culture’ in which, “empowerment, participation and collaboration are perhaps the main themes ...”. For Boud and Hager (2012) this fluidity is central to the idea of ‘becoming’, of forming confident professional identities. Being denied the opportunity to participate collaboratively may produce ‘unbecoming’ trajectories which lead to lecturers leaving the profession (Colley, James and Diment, 2007).

Conclusion and theoretical framework

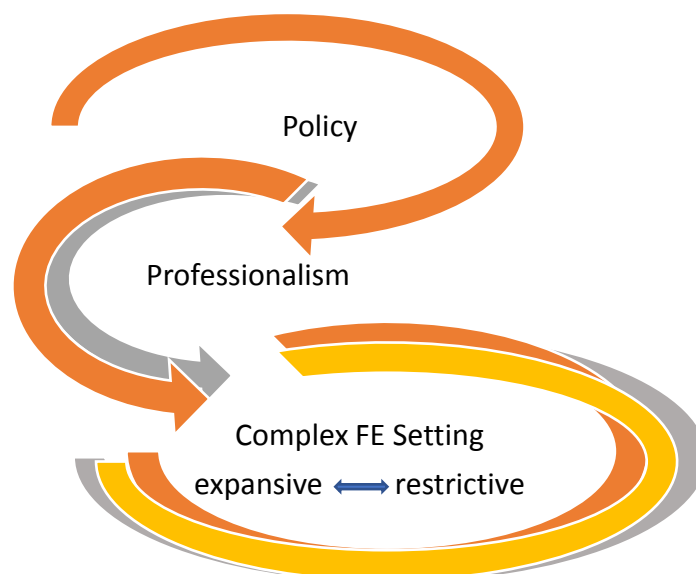
This section provides a conclusion which draws together significant elements from the review of literatures into a theoretical framework which can be used to steer the primary research and satisfy the key research aims. As stated in Chapter One these aims are: to better understand three significant forces (policy, professionalism, and workplace learning) acting upon FE settings and to consider how they might be marshalled differently in order to improve FE working lives.

The literature reviews have made clear that the ability of any FE workplace to respond constructively to policy and create ‘nourishing conditions’ for staff will rely on the setting’s capacity to promote key professional attributes which enter into a positive

reciprocal set of relations with expansive opportunities for staff learning. As Felstead et al. (2011, p. 9) state: “‘expansive’ learning environments are most commonly found where staff have high levels of discretion, autonomy and responsibility”. This reciprocity confirms the importance of using the three lenses (policy, professionalism and workplace learning) together when seeking to understand the FE workplace and these will form the components of the theoretical framework.

A key organising and conceptual tool for the research’s examination of workplace learning will be the expansive-restrictive framework (see *Table 1*). The framework is flexible enough to allow evaluations of professionalism and the processes of policy to be drawn through it when required. This provides richer possibilities for analysis. For example, the framework’s structure recognises that professional lives are marked by oscillating tensions and are pulled at by destabilising polarised forces. This aligns it with Stronach et al’s (2002) work on professional identity as well as Newman’s (2001) concept of co-existing but conflicting governance models. Recognising such alignments between the three lenses allows for a more nuanced and integrated exploration of context and, again, supports using the lenses in combination to scrutinise the empirical work.

The simple figure below captures the essence of the theoretical framework and the interplay therein:



(Figure 3: Essence of the theoretical framework)

As the figure illustrates, FE settings are permeated by policy (Ozga, 2000). Policy is generated from a number of sources and directions (Ball, Maguire and Braun, 2012), but the policy process for FE colleges has been predominantly ‘top-down’, both when

policy approaches the setting and then when it filters through the organisation. This can be explained by the dominant neo-liberal policy environment of the last thirty years or so which has produced hierarchical FE organisations, characterised by Ball's (2003) key policy technologies: marketisation, performativity and managerialism.

Figure 3 captures the point that policy is entwined with professionalism both before and after it enters settings. Whether the workforce is addressed directly or indirectly, in a sustained or opaque manner, FE policy always has the FE workforce 'in mind'. At times it may imagine, both in text and discourse (Ball, 1993), an FE workforce with the capacity to use knowledge, autonomy and responsibility in a mature and mutually beneficial manner, but it more often takes the view that prescription and 'tight coupling' (Hargreaves, 2008; Hoyle, 2008) are required.

This view of the workforce, the policies it subsequently informs, suggests the workplace experience of many in FE will be marked by disempowerment and alienation: the 'objects of reform' position (Hall, 2005). The literature carries many such stories, as has been seen. However, as *Figure 3* implies, since settings must accommodate a number of shaping, overlapping forces, FE workplaces are complex social settings and so resist easy characterisation. Professionalism, for example, can be a form of resistance, the cohesive concept behind alternative approaches to re-structuring and improving working lives. It may also form a contrasting oppressive discourse, as with Bathmaker and Avis's (2013) concept of 'organisational professionalism'. Similarly, some policies may be embraced by settings whilst others gain little purchase, are easily 'side-stepped' (Ball, Maguire and Braun, 2012).

When policy is sidestepped, the professional lens can help interpret the move. It may be principled infidelity, an act of 'academic citizenship' (Page, 2015), or simply unethical, fed by disinterest in the pedagogical arm of dual professionalism. If the latter, is this reinforced by the nature of the learning opportunities afforded in the workplace? How might such affordances be re-worked to stimulate interest? This example, again, shows the dynamic interplay provided by the three lenses in the theoretical framework.

A key strength of the expansive-restrictive framework is that it assumes complexity and contestation in settings. In effect, the continuums impose their own evaluative dynamics, illustrated by the double headed arrow within *Figure 3*, onto already dynamic settings. In doing so, they provide a space in which to make sense of what happens there. This research takes the view that, if FE workplace settings are to nourish, to be places where people feel valued and able to take on confident professional identities, then they must strive to be more expansive learning environments. It is, in short,

convinced by the expansive vision and considers that FE workplaces must seek to be characterised by fluidity, connectivity and inventiveness, hence the important role given to Fuller and Unwin's framework within the wider theoretical framework.

The 'optimal conditions' described above would provide a far richer base than currently exists for 'policy learning' (Hodgson and Spours, 2006; Higham and Yeomans, 2007; Raffe, 2015), a concept which, once more, shows the interconnections between the research lenses. Effective policy learning relies on creating the space – conspicuously absent in FE (Raffe, 2015) – to learn from previous successes and failure. This requires a collaborative model of policy learning to dominate (Raffe and Spours, 2007) in which information is allowed to flow both within settings and then in respect of their policy relationships with external stakeholders, including the research community, employers and local authorities. It is evident that the collaborative model of policy learning and the expansive characteristics in Fuller and Unwin's (2003, 2004, 2006) framework have much in common, not least in their privileging of situated learning and of the permeable boundaries required if it is to flourish.

Since policy learning is a vital aspect of workplace learning, the expansive-restrictive framework can work as a tool to evaluate how successfully settings are able to 'mediate' policy. For Coffield et al. (2008), mediation involves settings interpreting and 'acting upon' policy. Ball, Maguire and Braun (2012, pp. 2-3) describe mediation as a process which involves policy being: "diversely and repeatedly contested and/or subject to different interpretations as it is enacted (rather than implemented) in original and creative ways within institutions and classrooms". The authors (ibid, 2012) go on to point out that such responses will be 'constrained' by hierarchical discourse. This is undoubtedly the case in FE, although the expansive characteristics within each continuum offer models of practice which can counter such constraints. 'Key mediators' (Ball, 1993), for example, in their role of seeking to adapt policy to context and to 'gatekeep' will, in expansive settings, have much more developed channels of communication to draw upon and will, significantly, exist in a flatter organisational structure which invites such channels to be 'mined' (Eraut, 2004). Settings presenting such characteristics may be an indication that communities of practice have formed since Wenger (1998, p. 125) sees them as vehicles for, "sustained mutual relationships" which can provide the overviews needed to better, "assess the appropriateness of actions and products".

Although Gleeson, Davies and Wheeler (2005) suspect that communities of practice may struggle to form in FE settings, it seems more likely that they form in isolated sub-

cultures inside colleges, forging impoverished links with other internal communities, and perhaps none with those which exist beyond the setting. In the most 'difficult' situations, lecturers may have no 'legitimate' space from which, "to make contributions to the pursuit of an enterprise, to the negotiation of meaning and to the development of shared practice" (Wenger, 1998, pp. 184-185). A lack of access to such negotiated developments, the lack of voice, raises Freire's (1996) spectre of 'a culture of silence', which he felt to be a typical condition for oppressed communities. Oppression, for Freire, was marked by a series of interrelated characteristics, which include: submersion in current reality (see also: Sachs, 2003); isolation; a lack of community building dialogue; an inability to problematise myths; and 'paternalistic manipulation' based on a lack of faith in the capacity of the oppressed. Whilst Freire's initial focus was Brazilian peasants, aspects of his 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' (1996) have resonance for the FE workforce and his core solution – praxis – has much in common with notions of transformational professionalism and of retaining links between theory and practice (Bernstein, 1971; Hoyle and John, 1995). See *Appendix 1* (and *Table 2* within this) for further consideration, using a simple set of dialectical relations, of the links which can be drawn between Freire's concept of oppression and FE workplace relationships.

The literature reviews and my own experience of working in FE, whilst not suggesting the levels of subjugation which Freire describes, do point to 'restrictive' FE workplaces which are marked by, "jobs that are too small for our spirit" (Terkel, 1972, quoted in Unwin, 2004, p. 1). Using the three integrated lenses, with the expansive-restrictive framework as a key feature within this, will test such a view out across a range of positions and against current policy circumstances. Importantly, whilst I expect this integrated approach to help organise a better understanding of the current difficult workplace experience for FE lecturers and managers, it will also offer expansive 'ways forward' in the hope of finding a better match between job and 'spirit'.

Consequently, the research questions are as follows:

What is the current workplace experience of FE lecturers and managers?

1. To what extent are lecturers and managers able to align their practice with core professional attributes?
2. How is policy currently mediated within the FE workplace?
3. To what extent might the FE workplace be considered to be either expansive or restrictive?
4. How might the workplace experience of lecturers and managers be improved?

Chapter 3: Approach to the research

Introduction

This chapter considers the key decisions made in designing the research project on which the thesis is based and how they align with the challenges which the research questions present. It first considers methodology, the qualitative approach chosen, before going on to show how qualitative principles have shaped subsequent choices around research design, methods and sampling. It also seeks to demonstrate that the research has been based on rigorous, systematic analysis and proceeded from a sound ethical platform.

Methodology

Denzin and Lincoln's (1994, p. 2) definition of qualitative research includes seeing the qualitative approach as:

involving an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

Since the main research question focuses on exploring perceptions arising from involvement in an FE workplace setting, the qualitative paradigm, using broad interpretative principles, was appropriate.

This 'appropriateness' was emphasised by Cohen, Manion and Morrison's (2011) summary of the qualitative approach, which focuses on a number of key characteristics: we construct meaning – it does not reside independently of us; such meanings are socially constructed since they derive from social situations; given these two previous points, a researcher must look to collect data which draws out in-depth understanding of context (natural settings) and human behaviour therein; meanings are relative and so multiple, despite the regularising influence of dominant social and cultural forces. This summary accords with Robson's (2011, p. 132) view that qualitative research assumes: multiple realities; foregrounds the researcher as instrument (interpreting, utilising interpersonal/intrapersonal skills to help make the research richer); and makes participants' views of central importance.

These characteristics were an obvious shaping influence on the approach to this research project. A single-case study design was used because it made in-depth exploration of setting possible, foregrounding context. Similarly, semi-structured interviews formed the main data collection tool since they provided opportunities for

participants to think through their situated perspectives in some detail, making them central to the approach.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) emphasise that qualitative research is a *situated activity* in which, whilst the views of participants *are* central, the researcher is an important instrument in making sense of contextual interactions and this requires consideration. The interpretivist position embraces such 'reflexivity', since it assumes the researcher's biography will shape the research, that participants will respond differently to different researchers and so forth. As explained by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p. 225):

Qualitative enquiry is not a neutral activity and researchers are not neutral; they have their own values, biases and world views, and these are lenses through which they look at and interpret the already interpreted world of participants.

This research project's use of the three lenses of policy, professionalism and workplace learning to frame analysis of the setting and interaction with participants, illustrates this 'shaping influence', as does my starting position – outlined in Chapter One – that FE settings are in dire need of transformation. That is not to say that a 'rampant subjectivism' (Crotty, 1998) prevailed since processes were introduced to help counter the possibility that my perspective would dominate. Certainly, whilst I was an inside researcher, with a detailed knowledge of context and with preconceived lenses of analysis I was also 'open' to the data, not fixed, but reflexive. Stake (1995) refers to issues, foci of inquiry, which a researcher takes into a setting as *etic*. *Emic* issues, in contrast, are those which evolve from within the setting, sometimes in the shape of *etic* refinements. These distinctions, and the point that they work on each other, were important considerations when collecting data and enhanced the approaches to analysis, as will be seen in later sections of the chapter.

Maxwell (2005), cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p. 226), suggests that, ultimately, qualitative research has two goals: practical and intellectual. Both goals are evident in the aims which guide this research project; the research is 'practical' since it seeks to meet a perceived need: the improvement of the FE workplace experience. It is 'intellectual' since it is driven by a desire to better understand FE workplaces.

Research design: case study

Stake (1995, p. 2) describes 'cases' as 'bounded systems' (see also: Creswell, 1994); they are specific instances of something which contain various and complex working parts. For this research project, the 'bounded system' is one (Redgrove College) of the four main college sites which make up Forest Group, a recently merged set of general FE colleges located in a major urban conurbation. This 2017 merger consolidated two

existing mergers. Redgrove College, for example, had merged with Woodley College in 2009. The dominant college within Forest Group, Queensland, came into negotiations with an existing 'Good' grade from Ofsted. Redgrove/Woodley had been inspected at almost the same time, receiving a 'Requires Improvement' judgement. The new Chief Executive of Forest Group had previously been Queensland's Principal whilst Redgrove/Woodley's Principal had retired.

Forest Group caters for approximately 25,000 students in each academic year and has a turnover of £75 million. 16,500 students fall under Ofsted's remit whilst another 1,500 students are registered on HE courses. There are a number of Adult Education and Cost Recovery programmes spread across most sites. Redgrove College is a relatively small site within the larger Group. Its most recent Self-Assessment Report (for 2017/18) shows it has 3,053 students lying within Ofsted's remit and no HE provision. Of these students, around two-thirds are in the 16-18 age group, with the remainder being aged nineteen or over. Redgrove divides its provision into five main curriculum areas, known as Schools: Health and Social Care; Hospitality and Catering; English and Maths; Passport to Progression (High Needs provision and Foundation courses); Business, Engineering, IT and Construction.

As confirmed by *Figure 3* (see Chapter Two) the separation of a case from its context, its bounded status, is often 'blurred' (Yin, 2009). Context invades (external policy; notions of professionalism) and is, in turn, reached out into. Equally, there are various micro contexts within the case itself. Stake (1994) uses the phrase 'concatenation of domains' to help propose that a single case may be made up of many overlapping parts. These conceptualisations were crucial considerations in choosing to use a case study design since they were in close sympathy with aspects of my embryonic theoretical framework. The concatenation notion, for instance, can be identified in *Figure 3* and aligns with key issues in workplace learning theory. James's (2017, p. 112) work on FE learning cultures provides a good example: he sees them as formed by a series of 'inter-connected' elements, which include wider (macro) policy forces as well as individual (micro) dispositions. James (2017) imagines the elements arranged in concentric circles around practice, but moving in and out of vision – perhaps in sympathy with Yin's 'blurring' concept – depending on the type of practice being considered.

In this instance, the case had so many 'working parts', only certain elements of it could be scrutinised in sufficient detail. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) cite Verschuren's (2003) point in this regard: that 'holism' in case study research may need

to be replaced by a focus on 'relevant areas of interest'. Yin (2009) calls this approach 'embedded, single-case design'. Whilst a college site, for instance, may be the focal unit of analysis, there are also 'sub-units', such as individual lecturers, and departments. This 'sub-unit' concept emphasises the point that a key strength of case studies, and a significant reason for using the design in this research project, is the affordance provided to present 'fine-grained' or 'human-scale' data (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011, p. 291) drawn from the situated complexities of the case. This accords with the idiographic nature of interpretative research (King and Horrocks, 2010) and perhaps explains why Lincoln and Guba (1985), cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p. 220), state that, for qualitative research, "the natural mode of reporting is the case study" (see also: Hamilton, 2011).

The depth provided by the single-case approach meant that recommendations to support the development of better working environments for Redgrove lecturers and managers could be tailored to context, be sympathetic to the case's specific messiness of practice. Which elements of the 'way forward' professional models, for example, might carry most purchase in the setting? What possibilities for more expansive and democratic working lives could be identified as current policy initiatives permeated and were interpreted by the case setting? Which particular continuums within Fuller and Unwin's framework might carry most significance for the workforce in terms of building more capacity to control practice? It was important – an obligation – not to impose yet more 'alien solutions' (Engeström, 2004) onto this particular workplace.

Cases are in-depth and specific but can still be (tentatively) generalisable and carry wider validity. For instance, they take their place besides other cases which may (or may not) share key findings. Geertz (1973) argues that the researcher's main task is to offer 'thick descriptions' which provide a clear basis for the interpretations provided, thus opening up possibilities for relative evaluations. Ultimately, as Stake (1995, p. 1) points out: "We are interested in them [case studies] for both their uniqueness and commonality".

Stake (1995) explores this uniqueness/commonality theme further by suggesting distinctions between *intrinsic* and *instrumental* case studies. An *intrinsic* case emphasises exploration of the uniqueness of a case and is more inductive in nature. Within *instrumental* approaches, the case study is designed to shed light on specific points of interest, in the form of research questions, for instance, and to contribute to an improved general understanding. As Stake (1994, p. 237) suggests, the two approaches can be difficult to separate out, often inhabiting a 'zone of combined

purpose'. For Stake (1995), the driving force behind many *instrumental* case studies is the concept of *issues*, since much of the interest is derived from the sense that systems are under pressure, struggling with constraints. Furthermore, "issues are not simple and clean, but intricately wired to political, social, historical and especially personal contexts" (Stake, 1995, p. 17). These 'issues' shape the approach to the case, provide a 'frame of interest'. This description of instrumental case studies resonates with many of the factors which prompted and drove the approach to this research project. I approached the research expecting to encounter a system under multi-dimensional pressures, anticipating that these would be felt more or less keenly by different participants. The literature reviews show that such pressures are common across the FE sector and so what is learnt in this unique (intrinsic) context may be of general (instrumental) interest and inform approaches to other FE contexts.

Methods

Stake (1995, p. 114), in a discussion on triangulation, states: "When we speak of methods in case study, we are again speaking principally of observation, interview and document review". This research project sought to triangulate through using multiple semi-structured interviews as well as document review. Both methods are discussed in detail within this section. Before, moving on to this discussion, however, the third method listed by Stake – observation – requires some consideration. As an inside researcher, immersed in the case, I have had the advantage of being able to, over several years, observe and interact with lecturers and managers employed in the case setting. This 'insider-status' made a participant observer of me and was not a matter of choice. Therefore, I needed to consider the threats and advantages which appear in accounts of using participant observation in qualitative research. To deal with the advantages first: Robson (2011) posits that participant observation informs an understanding of how trustworthy retrospective accounts (interviews) may be. Certainly, I did not interpret interviews as an external researcher would have and feel that, consequently, I was able to bring a more insightful and 'empathic' (Stake, 1995) interpretation to the data. Burgess (1984, p. 103), in fact, cites Zweig's (1948) view that it is 'essential' to observe participants before interviewing them since this creates a more informed base for the process and is likely to produce more richness and depth in the subsequent data. This desire for richness and depth was a key factor in deciding to keep the research 'close to home'.

Equally, immersion in a setting raises, with regards to participant observation, certain threats: the issue of 'observational biases', for example. Robson (2011) suggests that

these include: selective attention, encoding, and memory. Since I was participating in the setting long before adopting what Sikes (2008, p. 150) calls the participant observer's 'double consciousness', I had built up a lot of heuristic, informal conceptions and needed to accommodate these carefully. In addition, observers may cleave towards or away from different individuals and teams within a setting, meaning perspectives can be over or under-represented. This was countered to some extent by sampling protocols (see analysis section) but I was also conscious of the need to avoid simply including those staff members who were well known to me or who were likely to reflect my views.

Many of the issues pertaining to the participant observation method are also pertinent to an insider research position, and so will be returned to when insider research is considered as part of a broader consideration of ethics later in the chapter.

Semi-structured interviews

Mason (2002, p. 63) considers the semi-structured interview to be, "one of the most commonly recognized forms of qualitative research method". It was an obvious choice for this research project since it provided focused opportunities to explore participants' experiences and contexts in-depth, so producing the 'situated knowledge' (Mason, 2002) required by the research questions.

Seventeen interviews were conducted in total, over a period of six months. This total was a compromise in that, although I would have liked to have interviewed more and did not feel I had reached 'data saturation' (Guest, Bunce and Johnson, 2006) at any point in the process, there was a limit to the amount of data which could be sensibly worked with in a project of this size. Interviews lasted between forty-five and eighty minutes with interviewees representing various levels within the organisation (see: *Table 3*). All interviews were audio-recorded and full transcripts produced. *Appendix 2* provides an extract of a coded example and gives a sense of how the interviews were conducted. The transcripts are dominated by interviewees with my role often confined to probing for situated examples, clarification or bringing back to the schedule when appropriate. The interview schedule supported the semi-structured nature of the process and appears here as *Appendix 3*. It acted as an aide-memoire with regards to thematic points of interest but was not used in a systematic way. The weight given to different themes varied depending on the interviewee's position in the organisational hierarchy or, sometimes, because a participant wanted to work through a particular concern or opportunity. Senior managers, for example, had much to say about the effects of macro-level policy but less on the curriculum. Whilst the interviews were

organised around *a-priori* themes (Stake's (1995) *etic* issues) drawn from the literature reviews, the flexibility of the semi-structured approach permitted new issues and connections to be explored and so for *post-priori* (*emic*) themes to come through.

Validity and reliability: interview data

The semi-structured approach taken is summed up by Burgess's (1984, p. 102) point that interviews should be 'conversations with a purpose'. The reference to 'conversations' suggests that interviews are exchanges, forms of social practice, in which knowledge is constructed and reconstructed (Kvale: 1996, 2007). I hoped that they would be useful for both parties and provide the space for reflective dialogue so often lacking in FE. This approach assumes that interview data, therefore, cannot be taken to be: "the unmediated expressions of respondents' real opinions" (Houtkoop-Steenstra, 2000, cited in: Robson, 2011, p. 279), or to necessarily correspond to actual behaviour 'in-situ' (Foddy, 1993). The data is generated by the process, after all.

This point, that interviews involve construction and reconstruction of knowledge, creates interesting questions around the validity of the data which is produced. Crotty (1998, p. 48) queries the notion of validity in such contexts, seeing only the possibility of more or less, "'useful', 'liberating', 'fulfilling', 'rewarding' interpretations ...". As Mason (2002, p. 63) points out, choosing the qualitative interview as a method implies an ontological position which views interpretations, experiences and so forth as, "meaningful properties of the social reality which ... research questions are designed to explore". The central question for this research is concerned with participants' perceptions and accounts of their working lives and does assume these are meaningful and will contribute to a better understanding of the FE working context. Handled well, in fact, interviews should go beyond what Mears (2012) calls the 'off-told-tale' since they will provide opportunities to probe, clarify and develop viewpoints. This produces data which is a more credible representation of the participants' perspectives, whilst making no claims for 'truth'. This credibility was supported by my inside-researcher status; I was sensitive to those parts of accounts which seemed 'at odds' with what I felt I knew of the setting and/or the interviewees. These prompted further explorations and, sometimes, a re-orientation on my part or the participants, with regards to the making sense process. This required patience and it was often not until quite a way into most interviews that I felt we were able to move beyond existing or protective interpretations and into dialogue which supported constructive development of perspectives on practice.

With regards to reliability: semi-structured interviews cannot be replicated and measured against positivist criteria. Mears (2012), however, suggests two processes which can help data to be a fuller and more accurate representation of participants' perspectives. The first process involves 'member checking' (see also: Stake, 1995) of transcripts by participants to ensure accuracy whilst the second is 'narrator checking', often involving a short follow-up interview in order to review key interpretations. Both processes were utilised in this research, although the follow-up interview was kept to about twenty minutes and was not taken up by all. The 'narrator check' encounters were supplemented by several useful and sometimes ongoing informal conversations with interviewees. If we came across each other on site at Redgrove, they would often ask about the research and this would lead into further discussion and an update on points which had arisen in interview. The narrator check process – in both formal and informal forms – was a useful aid to reflexivity since it helped to, "preserve the multiple realities" (Stake, 1995, p.12) of participants and reduce the dominance of my interpretations. As Braun and Clarke (2006) indicate, careful analysis is also helpful in this regard since it brings order to interpretations.

Documentation

Documents reviewed included those created by external sources, such as Ofsted, as well as those generated internally. The internal documents often fulfilled one of two purposes, sometimes both: they either presented the case talking to itself (internal memos; records of meetings; quality procedure directions) or seeking to present itself to external sources (self-assessment reports; position statements). Consequently, the process of documentation review provided a useful point of triangulation when seeking to, for instance: understand how policies were mediated at different levels or within departmental teams.

Access to documents was enhanced by my 'insider' status. I received Group emails and had access to Redgrove's intranet where all School self-assessment reports, quality improvement plans, awarding body reports, Section minutes and so forth were lodged. Redgrove's Principal also agreed to send on the documents which supported the weekly site management meetings and, in fact, I occasionally attended these meetings when my cross-Group duties required it.

Documents were used for more than collecting facts since they were interpreted, not taken at face value (Denscombe, 2010), and checked for credibility in interviews. Clearly, it would be naïve in most contexts to see documentation as factual records since they are often partial interpretations themselves – records of meetings, for

instance – and are created by sources of vested interest. This scepticism is particularly important in an FE context. As discussed in Chapter Two, the Sector is immersed in performative competition (Ball, 2003) and well-practised at creating shimmering spectacles. For Wallace and Hoyle (2005) this produces *semantic irony*, both in written documents and in verbal exchanges. This irony may be sincere or insincere but, regardless, is marked by a dissonance between what is represented and what is experienced. As Wallace and Hoyle (2005, p. 5) point out: “Visionary rhetoric is especially vulnerable to semantic irony. There is a designed-in disjunction between the lofty aspirational rhetoric and the more humdrum organisational reality that is experienced”.

Ball, Maguire and Braun’s (2012) research on policy enactment in schools found similar ironies in that, as senior policy actors sought to interpret and accommodate disparate reforms, they produced narratives, “ideally articulated through an improvement plot of some kind ... often very inventive, even fantastical” (ibid., 2012, p. 51). FE self-assessment reports are prime examples – my own versions could be described as parables in parts – in that they contain the ‘opening gambits’ and the ‘rallying calls’ when Ofsted inspects or staff are to be persuaded along certain courses of action. Ultimately, fantastical or not, the documents reviewed provided a plethora of data on policy, on attitudes towards professionalism and affordances around workplace learning.

Sampling

King and Horrocks (2010) emphasise that a desire for ‘diversity’ is at the root of many qualitative sampling approaches, with ‘purposive’ sampling – the approach taken for this research project – being the most common (Robson, 2011). The ‘purpose’ was to gather a variety of perspectives on the research questions in focus in order to draw out meaningful differences and similarities. As Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) suggest, however, there is always a difficult balance to strike in qualitative sampling since, although ‘rich and various descriptions’ (Geertz, 1973) are desired, there is a consistent danger of data overload.

The sample chosen for this research project consisted of seventeen participants from a variety of points in the organisation. As discussed when considering interviews, this total seemed to achieve the balance required: sufficient and varied data which could address the research’s terms of reference. Using an organisational chart as a reference point, care was taken to ensure that the setting’s five main Schools were all represented. Each School is structured around four hierarchical levels: senior

managers; middle managers, junior managers and lecturers. Senior managers manage more than one middle manager and are not dedicated to any one School. In addition, senior managers take on cross-Group responsibilities. The remaining three levels in the hierarchy carry out their work in discrete Schools. For two Schools, participants from each level were interviewed so that comparisons by level and mediation through levels could be understood more precisely in discrete parts of the setting. In addition, a range of hierarchical levels were included from all other Schools and there was a mix of genders as well as a range of experience, both with regards to time spent in the Sector and within the College. The lecturer level was best represented (seven of the seventeen participants) to reflect its higher numerical representation in the setting's workforce. *Table 3* below captures the range of interviewees, providing brief profiles for each. All names are pseudonyms.

Participant	Background
Senior Manager 1 (male): Paul	Chief Executive: Forest Group.
Senior Manager 2 (male): Jack	Principal: Redgrove.
Senior Manager 3 (male): Charles	Senior Manager: Finance brief across Forest Group.
Senior Manager 4 (male): Terry	Head of School (traditional vocational area) and Vice Principal for Redgrove. Ex-Ofsted inspector. Worked in FE for ten years after twenty-five-year career in industry.
Middle Manager 1 (female): Nadia	Head of School: academic curriculum area (Service Sector). Five years at Redgrove; in FE for fifteen.
Middle Manager 2 (male): Cameron	Head of School: academic curriculum area (Business). Two years at Redgrove; in FE for twelve.
Middle Manager 3 (female): Sara	Cross-Group brief for Quality. Worked in FE for thirty years; with Forest Group for three.
Junior Manager 1 (male): Nigel	Traditional vocational area. Two years at Redgrove; in FE for twenty. Fifteen years in industry before first teaching post.
Junior Manager 2 (female): Brenda	Academic curriculum area (Service Sector). At Redgrove for eight years; in FE for thirty-four. Head of School in previous post. On a 0.8 contract.
Junior Manager 3 (female): Rebecca	Academic curriculum area (Access provision: Service Sector). At Redgrove for seven years – obtained lecturing post whilst a trainee and subsequently promoted. Reverting back to lecturing role.
Lecturer 1 (female): Sheila	English and Maths. At Redgrove for two years; in FE for six. Appointed as a junior manager but stepped down – on a 0.8 contract.

Lecturer 2 (male): Robert	At Redgrove for ten years (traditional vocational area). Only teaching job. Marketing background.
Lecturer 3 (female): Betty	Academic curriculum area (Service Sector). At Redgrove for three years; in FE for six. On a 0.6 contract.
Lecturer 4 (male): Adam	Hospitality & Catering. At Redgrove and in FE for three years. Long previous career in the catering industry. Resigned a few months after being interviewed.
Lecturer 5 (male): Jeff	Passport to Progression. At Redgrove for nine years. First teaching post.
Lecturer 6 (male): Marcus	English & Maths. Worked at Redgrove and in FE for four years. Experienced (twelve years) school teacher abroad.
Lecturer 7 (male): Jim	Passport to Progression. Key Union role. At Redgrove for seventeen years.

(Table 3: Profiles of research participants)

Of the four senior managers interviewed, two (Jack and Terry) had discrete briefs for Redgrove and worked from the case setting, managing middle managers as part of their responsibilities. Terry's responsibilities were divided unusually; he managed a School whilst also taking on senior site responsibilities. This was an interim measure until a new middle manager was appointed. Of the remaining two senior managers, one was the Chief Executive for Forest Group. The second, Charles, also had a cross-Group role but with Finance as his main brief.

Middle managers have no teaching responsibilities whilst junior managers inhabit a hybrid role within the organisation: half of their timetable is devoted to teaching whilst the other half is set aside for discharging management responsibilities. Ultimately, there was a good balance achieved in the sample between managers, manager-lecturers and lecturers. This balance was an important consideration given the main research question and the point of view that a better understanding of the case could be arrived at by capturing perspectives from across the organisation's hierarchy. Within this, there are two issues worthy of note. Firstly, all of the senior managers were male. This was a relatively recent 'imbalance' since two female senior leaders had recently retired as part of the Group merger processes. Secondly, although staff on fractional contracts were included, there were no part-time lecturers. Again, this reflected the setting in that employment policy over the last few years had involved converting part-time employees to fractional status.

Data analysis

Robson (2011) describes analysis as the journey from data to interpretation. Thematic coding was adopted as the main analytical vehicle for this research project: interpreting via the process of separating out by key ideas. This is in sympathy with the epistemological position taken: that meaning does not 'emerge' but is constructed via the researcher's activity vis-a-vis the data. Accordingly, Braun and Clarke (2006) draw attention to the 'active' role the researcher (as instrument) plays in thematic analysis. For Coffey, Holbrook and Atkinson (1996, unpaginated):

coding is much more than simply giving categories to data; it is also about conceptualizing the data, raising questions, providing provisional answers about the relationships among and within the data, and discovering the data.

Chapter Four was most concerned with organising data into categories and allowing the voices of participants to come through whereas Chapter Five gave more emphasis to conceptualisation.

Analysis: interview data

Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasise that thematic analysis takes place across data sets, a number of interviews for instance, as well as within data items: individual interviews. This provides a coherent account of the setting's data whilst permitting the appropriate in-depth exploration of individual experience. It also addresses what Stake (1995) perceives to be an ongoing tension in case study research, between separate lines of enquiry and the case as a whole. Accordingly, the themed interview data for individual interviews were arranged in a single-case matrix (see *Appendix 4* for an example). A condensed matrix was then created for each of Redgrove's four organisational levels (see *Appendix 5* for the lecturer version) to allow for an overview of similarities and differences within and across levels. King and Horrocks (2010, p. 160) refer to these different types of tables as level one and level two matrices and, in turn, cite Miles and Huberman (1994) as an influence. Through several careful re-readings of a transcript, data were separated out using the three main research lenses (policy, professionalism and workplace learning) as a guide and then further refined into sub-themes in order to produce a level one matrix. Once the data had been reduced in this way, it was further reduced by organisational level to produce the four level two matrices. These matrices shaped Chapter Four – the presentation of findings – and were dominated by 'theory driven' *a-priori* themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

For the purposes of Chapter Five – the discussion of findings – more emphasis was given to *post-priori* 'data-driven' themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006) which were 'constructed' from the process of interpreting the data once it had been organised as

described above. Miles and Huberman (1984, p. 24) refer to this type of process – where *post* and *a-priori* themes work on each other – as a ‘concurrent flow of influences’. Importantly, it is this ‘flow’ which allows conceptualisations to be formed and refined by the research process rather than remain too anchored in pre-conceptions. *Appendix 6* provides an example of the condensed matrix which was created to provide analytical order to these conceptualisations. It also shows how the expansive-restrictive framework, as a key ‘thinking tool’, was used across data interpretations. *Appendix 7* contains explanatory thematic maps for both chapters four and five.

Analysis: documentation data

The documentation data were integrated into the condensed matrix created to provide structure to Chapter Five (see *Appendix 6*). This integration with the interview data helped to inform a ‘thicker’, more holistic interpretation of findings. Data derived from documents were identified by use of italics. This follows Cohen, Manion and Morrison’s (2011) advice that there should be fidelity to the tool used for data collection.

Ethics

The British Educational Research Association (BERA) prescribes eight key responsibilities which researchers have towards research participants. Some were irrelevant to this research project: there were no vulnerable adults or children involved, for example, and no incentives were offered. Those responsibilities which were relevant have been incorporated into the research. All interviewees, after an informal conversation to establish whether they would be interested in taking part, were sent a detailed information sheet (see: *Appendix 8*), outlining the purpose and scope of the research as well as the protections provided and the limits to confidentiality. The information sheet was accompanied by an informed consent form which interviewees returned to the researcher if they were willing to proceed (see: *Appendix 9*). All data derived from interviews were stored on a password protected computer and organised under pseudonyms. Where management titles (either standing alone or when linked to a curriculum area) were thought to make participants identifiable, these details were modified whilst retaining their fidelity. Senior managers understood that protecting their identity would be more difficult given the smaller group which they belonged to and, in fact, some gave permission for real names to be used, although this was not taken up. Transcripts were sent to participants once typed up. Whilst this allowed participants to check for accuracy, it also allowed them to re-confirm consent and to flag up any

sections which they were uncomfortable with. Participants become more informed as they take part in the research process (Robson, 2011), particularly where they have little experience of research, and it was felt important to provide this second opportunity for consent to be given. Malone (2003), however, problematizes the issue of consent within insider research, suggesting, for example that insiders may feel coerced into co-operating. Since this research project relied on insider research it had to consider insider issues in detail. These 'issues' were looked at briefly in the discussion on participant observation within the 'Methods' section but an extended discussion now follows.

Insider status can bring many advantages (Trowler, 2011). Being 'on the ground' post-research has helped me steer recommendations and bed them in. As an inside researcher I was also immediately 'culturally literate' (Trowler, 2011), bringing a detailed understanding of how things 'work' in the setting (see also: Coghlan and Brannick, 2005; Smyth and Holian, 2008). Trowler (2011) refers to this understanding as derived from 'naturalistic data' since it is constructed from informal, 'natural' encounters with participants. In my research, these encounters can be described as occurring within the auspices of participant observation, with the data produced then being supplemented by formal data collection via interviews and documentation review. It is this layering which can build the hoped-for richness and depth when collecting data, analysing and then reporting findings.

Familiarity with the setting can also be limiting: participants may already have formed a detailed idea of my alignments with regards to various issues in scope, so skewing responses (Coghlan and Brannick, 2005). Additionally, an insider researcher is enmeshed in the network of power relations which pervade organisations (Smyth and Holian, 2008) and so must be sensitive to the implications of power disparities when asking participants to take part and then when collecting data. I tried to dissipate such difficulties by choosing not to base the research project on the College site (Woodley) where I am employed for most of the working week. Whilst I have some cross-site responsibilities and have worked on various Redgrove CPD initiatives since it merged with Woodley in 2009, I have no management responsibilities there and interact far less frequently with its lecturers and managers when compared to my 'home' site. Nevertheless, when making initial contact I was careful to make the encounter as informal as possible – often a corridor conversation – and to stress that 'not having enough time' was considered an understandable response. At that point, participants only agreed to being e-mailed the information sheet so that they could reflect on what their role would entail. The e-mail required no response if individuals did not wish to

proceed and it re-confirmed that this was understandable. These 'slow steps' were particularly important when interacting with colleagues below me in the Group's hierarchy.

The notion of being an insider should not be reduced to a simple inside/outside dichotomy, however (Mercer, 2007). An external researcher with a senior management background may be considered more of an insider by research setting senior managers when compared to a relatively junior inside researcher: a middle manager, in my case. Similarly, organisations consist of various sections which develop their own sub-cultures; participants from these different sub-cultures will view the researcher's insider credentials differently (Floyd and Arthur, 2012). The Engineering junior manager in this research, for instance, would have responded differently to an interviewer who shared his occupational background. Furthermore, Mercer (2007) draws on several sources to suggest we assume multiple identities along an insider-outsider continuum, depending on the particularities specific to any encounter between participants and researchers (age, gender, ethnicity, rank, topic, 'home' department, ...). I tried to be sensitive to the positions being taken on this continuum within the various interview exchanges since I wanted participants to feel comfortable and able to tell the stories they deemed important.

There are risks to the insider research role but conducted carefully, ethically, it can be (and has been) very powerful in opening, "up opportunities to do work that can have a valuable and significant impact on [the] organisations and individuals involved, as well as contributing to the growth of shared knowledge" (Smyth and Holian, 2008, p. 33).

Conclusion

The research questions and the qualitative approach chosen subsequently, work to bring out the 'lived experiences' of lecturers and managers within the case study setting. The case was chosen, in part, following Stake's (1994, p. 293) advice: it was the case where I could spend the most time, without being too intricately involved, and therefore offered the best 'opportunity to learn' and so respond effectively to the questions I had set for myself. I also considered that my close and continuing links with the setting, as an inside researcher, offered a stronger opportunity to lobby for changes to practice once the research had been concluded. This practical aspect to the research (Maxwell, 2005) was an important element of the research questions.

The frenetic nature of the FE workplace, however, threw up many 'practical' challenges: it was not uncommon for an interview to be cancelled due to a new

deadline appearing in someone's working day. In addition, interviews took place 'in-situ', albeit in discreet parts of the building, and this sometimes meant that interviewees would race to interviews from busy, sometimes stressful, sections of their working day. The 'in-situ' location was the chosen preference of all participants and so needed to be adapted to. Sometimes this meant allowing space for interviewees to 'talk-out' their morning and be given time to settle. Sometimes, it meant postponing the interview if it was clear that the interviewee was too distracted to feel comfortable with the process.

The next two chapters present and discuss the findings which resulted from the 'opportunity to learn' referred to above, whilst Chapter Six considers any effect on practice.

Chapter 4: Stories from the FE workforce – a presentation of findings

Introduction

This chapter is organised into four main sections. Each section presents participant accounts from one of the four different levels in Redgrove's hierarchical structure: senior manager; middle manager; junior manager; and lecturer. The level assignments correspond to those in operation in the case and so are faithful to context in that regard. Evidence from documentation and concepts from wider reading are brought in on occasion where this was deemed helpful.

Organising accounts by level supports the tracing of perspectives through the organisation's structure (Coffield et al., 2008) and helps to perceive patterns and contrast within the same level. It also acknowledges that to work at different levels in an FE college is to experience that setting and the forces which run through it differently. Separating out helps to see this more clearly but also confirms this research project's position: that voices from each of the levels are an important aspect of coming to understand the case better. They, therefore, need their own space.

Each of the four main sections is divided by the same three headings: policy, professional criteria, and workplace learning. These concepts represent the three 'lenses' used to explore the case, underpinned the interview schedule, and help maintain the chapter's ties to the research questions. The concepts have been broken down into sub-themes: these are mostly *a-priori* in nature and derive from the literature review as well as my working knowledge of the case. Redgrove's recent merger, for instance, meant that exploration of the Area-Based Review process was particularly relevant. These *a-priori* themes were joined by two *post-priori* categories: 'set free?' within Policy and 'future possibilities' within Workplace Learning (see *Appendix 7* for a thematic map). Both of these *post-priori* sub-themes occurred in the interview schedule but their comparative significance only became clear during the research process. All levels, for example, expressed strong dissatisfaction with policy regimes, whether these existed beyond (most important for senior managers) or within (most important for all other levels) the organisation. With 'future possibilities', I was struck by the positive switch in tone which this topic brought to early interview conversations, particularly at lower levels, and so built in more time to consider it. Interview accounts sometimes produced a litany of fraught workplace stories and 'future possibilities' was

a therapeutic reminder that it was feasible for work to be a challenging and stimulating learning environment (Felstead et al., 2011).

Senior managers

Policy

Austerity

For all senior managers, reductions in funding linked to the policy of austerity were seen as carrying huge impact for Redgrove. Charles held a key Finance brief and reported that Redgrove's income had declined by fifty per cent since the election of the Coalition government in 2010. This dramatic decline was distributed across a number of income streams.

Redgrove relied on a large allocation of adult funding relative to many other colleges and so, in Jack's (Redgrove's Principal) opinion, had been more vulnerable to an austerity policy which fell hardest on adult provision. This view is confirmed by Lupton, Unwin and Thomson (2015, p. 26) who charted a two per cent decline in 16-18 funding between 2009/10 and 2013/14 but a twenty-six per cent decline in the Adult Skills Budget.

ESOL provision was seen as a prime example of adult income decline by senior managers. This was confirmed as a Sector-wide issue by a House of Commons briefing paper (Foster and Bolton, 2018) which found that funding for ESOL adult provision fell by fifty-six per cent between 2009/10 and 2016/17. It was also able to track a commensurate decline in enrolments of fifty-five thousand during the same period.

Charles felt that the introduction of adult learning loans had reduced applications significantly, both for Access courses and Level Three adult provision generally. That loans had served as a deterrent to adult returners is borne out by Foster's (2017, p. 13) finding that, although the budget allocation for advanced learner loans was £398 million in 2014/15, only £145 million was paid out. Paul confirmed that the merged Group was struggling to fill courses for which loans would be required; in fact, his point was that the Group was struggling to spend its adult budget generally, often because of difficult eligibility rules:

We've got a substantial allocation of about thirteen million pounds of adult education budget and two to three million pounds of adult learning loans; we don't hit either of those funding allocations, not for want of trying but because it's hard to attract enough people eligible to draw down those funds.

This, again, is a Sector-wide problem with FE Week (Camden, 2017) reporting a £200 million underspend for the adult budget in 2016/17.

There were also income difficulties with the 16-18 student cohort, mainly linked to the levels of funding. Charles, for instance, referred to the 'politically expedient' decision, from August 2014, to fund 18-year-old students at a lower rate when compared to 16 and 17-year-olds. Lupton, Unwin and Thomson (2015) report it as 17.5 per cent lower. Charles's estimate was that Redgrove and Woodley, taken together, had lost annual income of a million pounds as a result of the policy.

For Terry (Vice-Principal at Redgrove), who had run his own companies for twenty-five years before coming into FE, Redgrove was 'not at all' entrepreneurial and so not equipped to respond to austerity measures by growing its own provision. This reaches back to neo-liberal criticisms in the Strategy for Sustainable Growth Government Paper of 2010 which complained of too much growth being reliant on State spending and called for "a spirit of entrepreneurialism" to emerge (BIS, 2010a, p. 12). Charles, however, was sceptical about using education in this fashion:

It's such a different world, that to culturally take a college or go into a secondary school and say, hang on guys, what we really want is for you to come fifty per cent off public funding and be entrepreneurial. Most in the College didn't turn up for that...

All senior managers reported that austerity had contributed to a 'ferociously' competitive market for students, particularly 16 to 18-year-old students. Charles noted that: "When I first started [the borough] was predominantly 11 to 16. Now all the schools have sixth forms". Charles estimated that, for Redgrove and Woodley, 16 to 18 numbers were down from 2,700 in 2013 to 1,900 for 2017/18.

Paul also referred to contractions within Higher Education (HE) franchise agreements, explaining that, "universities are fighting tooth and nail to get as many students in as they can: they're under financial pressure". The local university had recently withdrawn from a franchise agreement, with the Group's Institutional Review document showing this would contribute to a drop in HE income of just over £1.6 million for the 2018/19 academic year.

Paul, as Chief Executive, captured the overall effects of austerity in stark terms:

I have had to interpret that policy [austerity] and apply it to an organisation and that's meant making sacrifices and not paying staff as well as I would have liked. We've not been able to invest properly in our infrastructure; we've had to lose jobs. So, we've been through a fairly miserable period as a consequence of all that.

Set free?

Senior managers were dismissive of the notion that FE had been set free. Paul spoke of colleges lacking adequate representation in the key negotiations leading up to the T-Level policy announcement via the Post 16 Skills Plan (BIS, 2016b). He summed up as follows:

So, the fundamental principles of a major reform which ought to last thirty, forty, fifty years are not open to discussion. The technical details of how these reforms will be implemented are there for us to pilot, to be asked about, but if you want to influence policy on the fundamentals of this new approach, there is no opportunity to do so.

When asked if he considered that apprenticeship policy had also tended to sideline the College voice, Paul's response was 'very much so'. He felt, for example, that many FE stakeholders had warned of weaknesses in the levy implementation package but were 'ignored'. Paul's point was given a deal of credence by statistics showing that apprenticeship starts declined by almost twenty-eight per cent between August 2017 and March 2018 when compared to the same (pre-levy) period in 2016/17 (DfE, 2018).

Jack confirmed that this slow-down in apprenticeship starts was being felt locally, meaning Redgrove would be unable to meet income targets it had set itself linked to apprenticeship provision. Both Jack and Terry took the view that the decline in starts was linked to levy payer uncertainty as to how the process would work and a lack of information getting to small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) regarding the benefits which may accrue to non-levy payers. This suggests that the policy had been phased in too quickly, a point confirmed by participants in Hodgson, Spours and Smith's (2017) research.

When Paul was asked if the promise to simplify funding rules had been kept, he responded:

No, no, no – the promise to simplify was always rather mis-stated; it was a simplification at Government level. They deferred or devolved a lot of the complexity to the colleges to operate, to make the eligibility decisions at a local level.

He felt that compliance requirements were too diffuse and often contradictory, meaning the Sector was very expensive to administer. Charles agreed, providing a working example of the difficulties encountered:

You can have a single programme of study group with three or four different funding formulas operating in that group. So, you'll have a 16 to 18 funding regime, a couple of 19 plus regimes in terms of how the students are funded; 18-year-olds will be at a different rate. And there have been two different funding bodies taking a view of those students.

Area-Based Reviews (ABRs)

Paul questioned the nature of Government discourse around ABRs, sensing that:

the job that needed doing was ... misattributed to the Sector exclusively and little was done to look again at the way in which policy development and the national funding arrangements were the causes of the situation that gave rise to Area Reviews in the first place.

Charles picked up on this theme, pointing out that despite the ABRs, “numbers are still falling, funding is still much reduced”. Nevertheless, his view was that once the prevailing wind of policy had begun to point towards ABRs and mergers then colleges had needed to grasp the opportunity to ‘revitalise the Sector’ and not ‘stand back’.

Charles shared Jack’s view that the Forest Group merger had proven ‘critical’ in providing: a stronger financial base; diversified income streams; reduced local competition for students; an opportunity to rationalise both the curriculum offer and the support infrastructure. All senior managers knew that this last point would mean significant job losses and, in fact, as interviews were underway, an Institutional Review proposal was published internally which sought to make a saving of £4.2 million to the Group’s staffing budget for 2018/19.

Professional criteria

Knowledge

Paul had gone through the Principals’ Qualifying Programme (now discontinued) and Jack had been on ‘several’ management courses over the years although did not consider himself to be, “an expert on management theory by any means”. Charles and Terry had learnt how to manage ‘on the job’. All were qualified teachers.

Jack worried that pay freezes – there had been no pay rises at Redgrove for eight years (Redgrove UCU Branch Memo, 2018) – and difficult terms and conditions generally, meant that, “the kudos of working in FE at the moment is not high”. For Jack, this had led to, “a potential issue with the calibre of staff we have in the Sector”. Jack also felt that what was required of vocational lecturers had changed: “so, a teacher has a much greater responsibility now for ensuring that students actually learn and for assessing and checking the learning”. He considered this to be a ‘potential problem’ since it required an engagement with pedagogy which was difficult to secure. The ‘potential problem’ was compounded by the unfavourable comparison Jack drew between FE and schools:

The School Sector is a graduate occupation with a requirement for post-graduate qualification. Inevitably, what that brings is a certain level of qualification, intellect and training. That’s not the same in our Sector.

Jack was more positive about CPD, feeling that it had become more contextually relevant over recent years. Terry agreed, describing Redgrove as having moved on from the 'sheep-dip approach'. Jack, however, worried that middle managers were not able to address their staff's CPD needs adequately, due to a lack of pedagogical expertise:

I think we have an issue with a number if not most of our middle managers in actually recognising what we are looking for in terms of teaching practice and learning of students.

Autonomy

When senior managers were asked whether they considered the organisation to have a high or low trust culture, responses were mixed. Terry deemed it to be 'low trust', mainly because of a previous senior management regime which had been replaced in the 2017 merger process. His view was that this previous regime had produced a fearful middle-management stratum lacking the confidence to trust lecturers and junior managers to innovate. He felt this culture was beginning to change now that a new senior management team was in place.

Jack hoped it was a high trust culture, particularly since, as the new principal for the Redgrove site, he felt a deal of responsibility for the cultures which prevailed there. He accepted that the College was hierarchical in structure, meaning that senior managers were possibly too remote from lecturers and that this would lead to disjunctures in goals, trust and so forth.

Paul was determined to create a culture of mutual trust in which lecturers were encouraged to participate, to enter into dialogue. His view was that the 'heroic leader' concept was 'foolish' and that the organisation, "was full of very well qualified and clever people, many of whom are better qualified and know more than I do". He was keen to find ways to utilise this expertise and yet also sensed an uncomfortable deference to his seniority at Redgrove, an unwillingness to enter the 'open door policy' space he was making available.

Responsibility

Jack stated the importance of, "instilling and fostering a culture in which people actually want to get better". Whilst he felt some relished CPD opportunities, he worried that others, "are absolutely stuck in the mud". He considered it to be a duty of senior leadership to instil this professional responsibility where it was lacking. Terry reported along similar lines, feeling that until recently the atmosphere at Redgrove had been

'comfy' with 'an element' of the teaching workforce being too 'relaxed' about the need to improve, despite a 'Requires Improvement' judgement from Ofsted.

There was acknowledgement from all senior managers that the workload pressures on staff made it difficult for them to make time for more self-directed professional development. For example, Terry lamented that, "we are using people as a resource". There was no evidence of senior managers themselves currently taking on formal opportunities for professional development.

Workplace learning

Current situation

It was clear that Paul wanted to participate in as many channels of communication as possible and he had taken steps to accomplish this. As well as his 'open door' policy he encouraged 'village pump' style impromptu meetings and had initiated weekly newsletters. He had also recently chaired an Inquiry organised by a key FE stakeholder and served as a governor for two major education providers in the sub-region. He was, in short, heavily involved in several types of cross-boundary social practices. This was atypical in the interview accounts.

External networking for Jack was rare, but he felt that day to day, "I've learnt most from other people, being in that situated position". A key benefit of the merger for Jack was the opportunity to work with new colleagues, see how they approached similar issues. Terry was in much the same position: he had very few external connections, and none with local employers. He felt he learnt a lot simply by talking to the different middle and junior managers under him and by 'walking the corridors'. This freedom to move through the setting's different social spaces and so engage in multiple forms of dialogue was much more pronounced at senior management level.

Future possibilities

Paul had a vision of what he would like for staff regarding workplace learning. He spoke of structuring in 'pay you to learn' opportunities for staff and of protected time which: "prioritises [their] development above all the other competing priorities". He worried about financing it given that, "we're stuck in this productivity, this level of productivity", but then did begin to reach for solutions rooted in the design of teachers' working week to alleviate the excessive burdens of administration and marking.

Senior managers: a summary

Senior managers confirmed the ongoing debilitating effects of austerity and were able to provide a series of detailed examples, not least the likelihood of imminent and large-scale redundancies. Paul, the Chief Executive, felt he and his senior team had little power to affect such policies and were left 'to make the best of it'. This included identifying the opportunities which emerged from the top-down policy process and taking the initiative, where possible, as with the recent creation of the merged Forest Group.

Whilst Paul had great faith in the talents of the workforce and rejected the 'hero' role, Redgrove's Principal was notably unsure of the capacity of those who worked under him, implying that a firm hierarchy remained important. This dichotomy of views, with regards to the professional capacity of less senior colleagues, was also a feature of middle and junior manager accounts.

Although Paul's external networks were well developed, the remaining senior managers were focused on internal issues, leaving little space for their own formal professional development or for democratising discourse with other stakeholders. Their position at the top of the hierarchy, however, did provide them with the space to build empowering connections within the merged Group and in Redgrove itself.

Middle Managers

Policy

Austerity

Cameron had a general awareness that Redgrove faced financial challenges and was surprised there had not been a more dynamic response to these in recent years.

Nadia's perception was that austerity had narrowed the horizons for senior leaders: "All they're interested in is getting the money in to keep afloat but they're not looking at what's needed ... on the steps below to enable that to happen". These 'steps below', for Nadia, meant investing in the quality of the curriculum offered. Sara made a similar point, worrying that resources were spread too thinly for good quality provision to prosper: her examples included the lack of administrative support for the English and maths offer, and of course leaders having to take on split-site responsibilities to cut costs.

Middle managers possessed very little detail on the wider policy initiatives driving austerity.

Set free?

Both Nadia and Cameron attended weekly site management meetings. When Nadia was asked if the meetings provided her with the space to support Redgrove's response to policy here response was: "No! All we get really is ... these changes are happening; this is what you've got and you've got to get on with it". Cameron found the weekly meetings useful but described them as 'information giving', of occasions for 'being told' things; his presence at them seemed to be quite passive.

This idea that middle managers were largely excluded from policy learning opportunities was strengthened by Nadia's point that, whilst she was aware the previous Principal had been a member of national steering groups, "we never got asked for our conversation, how it [national policy] would impact us, how we could feed that back". Sara perceived a similar disconnect, feeling that a world involving, "tea at the Gherkin with Sadiq [the London mayor]", had led to a narrow and intransigent perspective, an "I know best for my college kind of view".

All middle managers held excoriating views on national curriculum reforms, including the insertion of exam units into vocational qualifications which, in Cameron's area, had led to a twenty per cent decline in achievement. For Sara, the 'fatal flaw' in the introduction of exams was that, "you had people making those decisions who don't understand FE and don't understand FE learners". Sara was consequently amused by an open letter from Ofqual (2018) which announced a 'Near Pass' grade (good enough) for Applied General qualifications because of political concerns over success rates.

A second key concern with regards to curriculum reform was the condition of funding rule for English and maths provision on Study Programmes. The rule, a response to Wolf's 2011 Review, stipulates that 16 to 18-year-old students without a high GCSE grade (A*-C or 4-9) in these subjects should continue to study them. All middle managers saw the concept of continuing to engage with English and maths as valid but agreed with Sara's point that the re-take approach was flawed and:

has considerable impact on [Redgrove] in terms of the resource and energy that has to go into just getting students into the classroom, let alone teaching them and improving their skills.

The difficulties encountered can be gauged by the GCSE re-sit (16-18) high-grade achievement rates for Redgrove in 2016/17 which were reported as 9.5 per cent for English and 16.3 per cent for maths (Redgrove Self-Assessment Report, 2017).

Area-Based Reviews

For Sara, the merger was 'essential': "I think without it there's a question mark over the long-term viability of the College and its ability to provide what we do for our communities". Sara's feeling was that the merger was an opportunity to revitalise Redgrove. Nadia confirmed the revitalisation theme: "I think for us it could be good – some life put into things".

Cameron was also positive, feeling the new regime would be more efficient, would 'stop coasting' and provide an improved 'learner first' culture. Linked to this, he was impressed with the new Chief Executive, comparing him favourably to the previous Principal whom he had rarely met: "I never had a sit-down meeting with her which I found quite strange being a Head of School".

All accepted that job losses would follow, and all knew that they would be in scope personally. Cameron considered himself to be on a twelve-month rolling contract anyway, "with the cuts every year and the restructures". No indication was given that they might have some say on how the new merged structure would look. Nadia summed the process up as: "it's just waiting for them to make a decision and stick with it and then we'll work with it".

Professional criteria

Knowledge

None of the middle managers interviewed had attended management training courses. All were trained teachers and had qualifications linked to the curriculums which they managed. Of the two middle managers interviewed who had discrete charge of a curriculum area, neither had vocational experience.

Cameron's department had been graded as 'inadequate' in the College's self-assessment process for 2016/17. He felt staff recruitment was a key reason behind this: "Recruiting people of the right calibre and retaining them is a huge challenge". He felt that, with one or two exceptions, his department's lecturers were, "the weakest team I've ever worked with". Nadia was more positive about her team's capacity, feeling that she had 'some very good teachers' in her team. She did, however, also report challenges within some subject areas in recruiting staff with appropriate expertise.

Views on CPD, both for themselves and for their teams, were also mixed. Sara picked out the issue of 'coasting' lecturers since: "the FE sector ... is notoriously bad at

performance managing staff". Sara, however, did feel that internal CPD processes had begun to make 'improvements' more possible recently, with a shift from blanket-like compulsory attendance to a more 'democratic' process. This was confirmed by Cameron, who felt that CPD was now much more interactive and relevant, not least because Schools had been provided with dedicated Advanced Teaching Practitioners (ATPs).

Although Cameron considered CPD to be more positive for his lecturing team, he described his own professional development as having 'stagnated' since joining Redgrove. From Cameron's perspective, middle managers were not supported well in general:

I feel we've had very little professional development in terms of keeping up to date with changes in the Sector and just, at times, really, the duties we have to perform in terms of performance management of staff, budget management ...

Nadia took the same position:

I don't feel that any of the middle managers are really invested in or given support or proper training. I've never had any training – I was a brand new Head of School, new to this kind of level and never had any training, input, ... anything ... on any of it.

Autonomy

Nadia was equally scathing when asked whether the organisation had a culture of trust. She described a 'command and control' culture in which, "It's all about competition; it's all about comparing people so that everyone's working against each other instead of working with each other". She described 'horrendous', 'humiliating' meetings with senior managers in which:

We were getting shouted at and when someone responded they were getting shouted at so it didn't feel like anyone could respond, and we were getting told off because we weren't responding!

Nadia felt the atmosphere had now improved, partly because the merger had ushered in a different approach. She suspected that the hostile approach of senior managers had been caused by poor success rates and of feeling exposed by these in the restructuring process. Interestingly, when she came to describe her relationship with the staff she managed, Nadia referred to a 'mutual trust', open lines of dialogue and 'honesty'. She recognised her staff were under pressure but thought that they, in turn, understood Nadia was not the root cause and would ameliorate the effects where possible.

Susan took the view that tight coupling was necessary, that, "even if we want to have a nice, fluffy, yes we all trust you to do the best you possibly can, you can't do that

because you're jeopardising the success of the institution". The answer, for Susan, was lots of 'hard data' which allowed a 'deep drill-down' into practice, particularly given Redgrove's recent 'poor' Ofsted. This was achieved through various software programmes such as Pro-monitor, on which lecturers were expected to set and review targets, enter marks, set disciplinaries, and so on. Cameron also wanted tight structures, feeling he had given too much freedom in the past and it had led to poor practice.

Responsibility

Although Cameron and Sara welcomed more context specific, localised CPD, they were concerned that many lecturers and junior managers would not, subsequently, take responsibility for their own professional development. Nadia was adamant, however, that this was not through choice but because of punitive workloads. She felt similarly about her own workload: "at times it's unmanageable. I think pretty much across the board it's the same". A key cause of this was, "we're so busy evidencing what we're doing that we're stepping away from the main point, which is the students and providing quality teaching...". This is Lyotard's (1984) 'law of contradiction' (cited in Ball, 2003): so much time is spent amassing the data to evidence good practice that the good practice falls away (see also: Hoyle and John, 1995; Newman, 2001).

Cameron's workload was even more punishing: "My work-life balance is poor. A lot of the time I pretty much work seven days a week. I work between sixty and seventy hours a week, which is high! Obviously". Clearly, taking on this amount of work is not what Hoyle (2008) would describe as a professionally responsible response to the situation but Cameron's opinion was that it was needed, "to keep things afloat", since his team was so weak. In Page's (2011) typology terms (albeit for junior management level), Cameron fitted perfectly into the 'martyr' category.

Workplace learning

Current situation

Sara's opinion was that her cross-Group brief gave her a privileged position. As she said: "Whenever you talk to anybody who starts working in a cross-College role, they're always amazed and astonished at everything that's going on in the institution outside their Schools". This access meant she was able to build supportive working (learning) relationships, "with people from right across the Group". The merger had opened-up horizons for Sara.

Cameron, in contrast, complained of too many 'silos', of having no contact with identical curriculum areas on other Group sites. He also complained of opaque internal recruitment strategies which he felt limited his promotion opportunities. Bounded communication along with perceptions of stasis with regards to progression are both features of a restrictive learning environment (Fuller and Unwin: 2003, 2004, 2006). However, in other regards, Cameron was working in an expansive fashion. He had, independently, created a number of connections with local employers and this had then fed into the curriculum via, for example: employer guest speakers and mock interviews. Cameron became noticeably more animated and enthusiastic when discussing these employer-student connections: "It's really positive and the learners really engage with it. And the feedback from employers has been fantastic". However, because the time to forge these connections had to be found on top of his other responsibilities, rather than being designed into his working week, he worried about being unable to sustain the relationships.

Nadia perceived a similar stasis around career progression: "I don't feel there's any chance of being developed so maybe I could move up in my career, whether it's here or somewhere else". However, she had been proactive in setting up 'expansive' learning opportunities for herself away from work and had just graduated after studying part-time for a degree in Education. Her studies had provided opportunities to: "re-evaluate my role, my job, my area".

Future possibilities

Future options in this category were not a strong feature of middle manager accounts although one significant (expansive) initiative was discussed. Nadia and some of her middle-management colleagues had begun to occasionally meet informally after formal meetings to provide support and help each other 'make sense' of issues which had arisen. These meetings were about to be made weekly and invitations extended to all middle managers.

Middle managers: a summary

Whilst senior managers railed against their lack of voice in national policy-making, middle managers complained, sometimes bitterly, of being omitted when policy was received and 'made sense of' by the organisation. This marginalisation extended into perceptions that their professional development was ignored and that they were isolated. The Quality Manager (Sara) was the 'privileged' exception here since her role was designed to cross internal boundaries. All felt that the merger offered exciting new

possibilities, not least because it had replaced a senior leadership team deemed to be oppressive.

Their view of the professional capacity of those who worked for them was mixed. Cameron and Sara felt that accountability systems were lax, despite their criticisms of the authoritarian nature of the previous leadership team, with each echoing the fears of some senior managers that many in the workforce were 'coasting'. Nadia was much more empathetic and even where she noted resistance, to engage in CPD for instance, put it down to undue workplace demands. Such demands were also a damaging feature of middle managers' workplace experience, with Cameron almost fitting two working weeks into one.

Junior Managers

Policy

Austerity

Junior managers were unable to talk in any detail about external policies linked to austerity. They were, though, aware that finances were an issue and described the impact in their own sections. Both Rebecca and Brenda, for instance, were involved in Access provision and reported reduced group numbers following the introduction of adult loans. Brenda also referred to the loss of nursing degree bursaries which had further depressed demand for Access to Nursing provision: "at one point we had six [Access] groups of Nursing and we've only got two now". Nigel had previously run 'very popular' ESOL Engineering and Plumbing courses but been forced to withdraw them when the funding 'disappeared'.

Set free?

When asked about government policies, Rebecca's response was: "I'm not very good at the policies. I just think about day to day rather than what's coming from Government". She cited time and lack of interest. Internal policies were of much more concern at this level. These received mixed responses with regards to their effectiveness, but all of the junior managers agreed that they had little opportunity to shape them.

All favoured the (top-down) switch to learning walks from graded observations and felt staff were mostly comfortable with the process. Nigel was a 'huge fan' of Pro-monitor with his one concern being that staff lacked the time to populate it with enough detail.

Appraisals were not regarded highly. Nigel saw them as:

a piece of paper ...I've gone in ... I've signed and it won't come out again until next year. So, anything I've put on there about training needs etcetera will sit in the drawer and not get addressed.

For Brenda and Rebecca, appraisals were just records to be sent up to senior managers, with too much form-filling involved. Rebecca's point was: "It's not about what an individual wants so much as it's what the College needs you to do".

Area-Based Reviews

Brenda had spent over thirty years in FE and was phlegmatic about the merger: "It's as ever in FE ... change ... it's always change". She worried, though, that the adults she taught would lose the opportunity to study locally when the inevitable 'consolidation' followed. She took it for granted this would entail job losses but, nevertheless:

I can't help but be encouraged by the new Chief Executive. Even if he's going to make twenty million people redundant, at least the way he's doing it is by sharing information so that people can understand.

Rebecca liked the idea of suddenly having more professionals around her who it would be possible to share ideas with: "that's quite exciting".

Nigel shared this positivity, feeling that: "It's [the merger] a good opportunity to learn from other colleges ... if Queensland are getting the best results what are Queensland doing different to us?". However, he also felt the merger had encouraged the emergence of strong individual college identities, creating a competitive situation which he relished:

We're quite a strong college on our own and I think we'd be looking at certainly being on a par, maybe slightly ahead of Woodley. And it gives us the remit to start hunting down Queensland, being on their shirt-tails.

As with middle managers, none of the junior managers felt they had been given a role in the merger process. Nigel's view was that, consequently, some of the decisions around the change had been made by the 'wrong people'; he confirmed that his opinions had not been sought out even though, "I could give some good ideas into stuff like that".

Professional criteria

Knowledge

All junior managers were qualified teachers and held qualifications within their different fields, but none had undergone management training, none were members of SET and none had heard of the new (2014) professional standards. Two of the three (Rebecca and Nigel) had considerable industrial experience in the subject areas which they taught, although for Nigel this was over a decade ago.

Rebecca was an enthusiastic supporter of dual professionalism although she was not always able to convert this into practice. On reading around her subject, she made the following point: “I’m a bit of a geek when it comes to stuff like that. I love learning”. With regards to pedagogy: “I would just like to have time to be able to go and watch other people teach what I teach at the level that I teach”.

Both Rebecca and Brenda felt their teams were well qualified and had expertise in their subject area. Rebecca, however, made the following point: “there are many, many staff who are asked to teach subjects they’re not comfortable with, to make up their teaching hours”.

Nigel was much less confident around the levels of expertise to be found in his team, particularly with regards to pedagogy:

Some of the teachers that I work with ... they’re not really teachers. They’ve come into the profession – don’t know how. Very poor teachers. If I looked at my twelve teachers I wouldn’t be overly-concerned if I lost half of them, because of the standard of the work they do.

He felt this situation made it difficult for the department to improve and that this was compounded by poor quality applications when jobs did arise: “I tried to recruit an Electronic Engineer for about a year and a half and didn’t get a single applicant who I would consider to be good”.

With regards to CPD, Rebecca felt it had begun to improve but retained a propensity to be ‘one size fits all’. A key theme in Rebecca’s interview was how ‘time-poor’ she and her team were and this emerged again when CPD came up: “you can do all the CPD in the world – if you don’t have time to implement it then you’re just going round in circles aren’t you?”.

Nigel felt that CPD days were poorly organised ‘top-down’ affairs: “On the morning, I’m slipped a PowerPoint – here you are, this is what you’re doing today. I can’t even think what we’ve done in the last few slots”. He was more positive about the ongoing CPD support and had liked a recent ATP initiative involving peer observation triangles.

Autonomy

Rebecca’s responses around autonomy were a reminder of Hoyle and John’s (1995) point that professional autonomy has two key contexts: the classroom and then the organisation itself. Rebecca enjoyed teaching and felt she was, “left alone so I can experiment fairly freely”. In the wider organisation, the situation was different and Rebecca complained about its tightly coupled characteristics. For example, she responded to the internal policy which insisted on lecturers having a lesson plan for

each taught session as follows: “How many times can someone say, ‘I don’t plan that way?’”. Nigel similarly ‘loved’ being in the classroom but was also frustrated by the lesson plan policy, feeling it was unrealistic: “You’ll be working 60 hours a week!”.

Rebecca was about to relinquish her junior management responsibilities and revert to being a lecturer. A key reason for this outward trajectory (Wenger, 1998) was the relentless pressure to provide data. This was allied to a perceived inability to change these circumstances: “you just bang your head against a brick wall!”. The classroom provided sanctuary and she wanted more time there. Nigel observed similar, unrealistic top-down pressures, blaming ‘out of touch’ senior managers. He recounted the following from a recent meeting, starting with paraphrasing one of the senior team:

‘Oh the unions are up in arms again, about they’ve got too much work-load. Why don’t they just bloody well get on with it? They’ve GOT to chase up students, they’ve GOT to chase up phone calls, they’ve GOT to do this’. And I just thought: you’ve forgotten where you came from coz it’s just unrealistic. You just can’t do it in 35 or 37 hours a week.

Neither were against tracking and data collection per se but objected to the volume demanded. This was exacerbated by having to contend with a variety of systems which were considered not to be joined-up, resulting in duplication of work. Rebecca also complained that data was frequently required on such a short turnaround that it was difficult to produce a ‘proper’ response. One example given of this involved being asked to complete learner profile sheets before she or her team felt they had built up the requisite knowledge of individual learners. Consequently, they were either ‘sketchy’ or ‘made-up’.

It might be expected that the tightly coupled setting which emerged above, ever anxious for positivist confirmation that responsibilities were being fulfilled, would produce widespread low trust cultures, but that was not the case. Throughout the research, immediate line managers were seldom blamed for restrictive working environments and it was that relationship which interviewees turned to first when considering trust. Brenda, for example, felt she was ‘highly trusted’ by her line manager (Nadia) and gave several examples of being left to use her experience as she saw fit. Whilst Brenda valued this autonomy, there was a danger of it becoming isolating. She made the point that: “I would like to know a little more about what’s going on”, and sometimes found it ‘disconcerting’ that she got so little feedback. The possibility of being isolated was compounded by the lack of opportunity for junior managers to meet as a team under their own terms. Brenda’s point was:

If we do get to meet it’s very structured. And I do think that there should be something in place about sharing, experiences, and how you are dealing with things. Think about this process ... have a chat.

Responsibility

With regards to work-load, both Brenda and Nigel felt comfortable, in control. Nigel, for instance, was the only interviewee in the entire research project who successfully 'protected' his lunch-hour: "Everyone knows in the office that 12.30-1.30 is my lunch-break. If students knock it's a no-no". He 'switched-off at 5 o'clock' and refused to take work home. For Brenda, the control derived from her experience and a comprehensive understanding of her role. However, in an aside, it became apparent she had come in to work on her day off for the previous two weeks to catch up with marking. Paul, the Chief Executive, referred to this type of behaviour as fulfilling FE's 'unwritten contract'; it almost went without saying that staff across all levels would supply a certain amount of unpaid labour. Nigel was the absolute exception in this regard.

Rebecca's experience with regards to control was quite different: "I'm tired all the time. I feel like I can't turn my brain off". She felt she had been given a lot of responsibility but little control, a second key factor in her decision to leave junior management.

Workplace learning

Current situation

Brenda referred to her small group of lecturers as the 'dream team'. This was based on their cohesiveness, forged over a number of years, and their desire to 'constantly improve'. She described the atmosphere between them as 'kind and thoughtful'. These strong intra-departmental relationships were very important to Brenda. For much of the interview she seemed content not to play a wider role in College processes, preferring to, "ferret away in my own little area and do my best to make that shine". This was partly predicated on her view that the junior manager voice was disregarded when it came to internal decision-making. In the past, she considered she had been too passionate, said too much in attempts to be heard. She suspected this had counted against her when a promotion opportunity had arisen a couple of years previously.

Nigel made a similar point on needing to be cautious about 'speaking out' (a key professional responsibility). He had been advised by his line-manager (Terry) to curb his outspokenness in meetings, to: "sit quietly and hope that it ends soon". He explained how one of his (middle manager) colleagues at another site in the Group coped: "he won't speak at a meeting. He just doesn't do it. He says, 'No – they don't listen'". Meetings outside of 'home' departments appeared to present real problems with regards to facilitating empathetic, constructive dialogue. Rebecca, for instance, recalled her manager's experience of Principal Review meetings under the previous

regime, saying: “they were more like an interrogation than a let’s discuss and see how things are going”.

Rebecca provided a much more positive example of a meeting within her home department, describing how lecturers from various disciplines met to evaluate each other’s assignment briefs: “as a team it’s made us much closer because we’re all brainstorming ideas for different areas and we’re using each other”. Such meetings were very difficult to organise, however, because of the mix of fractional and full-time staff, summed up by Rebecca as follows: “I don’t see one lecturer ever. I see my evening staff on lunch-breaks and things like that. I don’t have a lot of contact”.

With regards to external contacts, these were badly underdeveloped. Rebecca had HE links which offered ‘heaps of training’ but which, “always seemed to clash with teaching”. Neither Rebecca nor Nigel had developed employer links. Nigel described the number of work experience opportunities in Engineering as being ‘pretty much zero’, despite his view that it should be a crucial strand of the curriculum. Nigel also considered secondary school links to be vital, “but in two years I’ve not been out to a single school”. When asked why this was, Nigel’s response was: “again, time constraints. I’ve got so many good contacts but my days are just jam-packed-full. And, usually, the stuff that I’d planned to do gets put to one side”.

Future possibilities

Although Brenda had stated she was content to ‘ferret away’ in her own department, upon being asked whether the College was perhaps missing out on her reservoir of expertise, she became much more creative about what her professional role might entail. For example, when discussing her observer duties when delivering teacher education in a previous job, Brenda made the following comment: “But that’s the stuff I probably miss ... hang on ... shouldn’t that be what an elder member of staff should be doing with their time?”. She then began to imagine more expansive roles for members of her team. On describing the qualities of an experienced Childcare lecturer, Brenda suggested that:

She should be out talking to the local authority and getting them involved in local schemes and getting the students in. But she needs to do [teach] 23 hours a week ... There are other things which someone might be really good at – they could teach less and develop something.

Rebecca had many suggestions for improving workplace learning, mostly based on getting staff more involved in decision-making. A key point for her was that staff needed to feel listened to; if ideas kept not being taken up, “that’s the point when people stop trying to be responsible for anything”. She wanted sub-committees

organised where people with similar types of expertise could come together to solve an issue. Her hope was that these would involve, “normal people communicating with normal people”, relatively free of constraining hierarchical structures. This ‘genuine’ meeting of minds, in Rebecca’s view, would make realistic, practical solutions more likely.

Nigel advocated similar solutions to the existing lack of voice and of learning opportunities, referring to the use of working groups in his previous career in industry:

If there was a problem in production or anywhere really, we’d put a team together and that could be the managing director, the lady from the canteen, someone who hangs coats, anybody, anybody in there who can put an opinion in, who might just come up with something ... why are you doing that? And you go, what do you mean? WHY are you doing that?

For Freire (1996), such insistent, jointly formulated *why* questions are signs of emerging critical consciousness, ‘new understandings’, and a rejection of ‘submersion in practice’ (oppression). They also evoke Argyris and Schön’s (1974, 1978) notion of ‘double loop learning’ (and Engeström’s (2009) concept of expansive transformation in activity systems) whereby problem solving involves a collegial and critical examination of underlying assumptions and ‘aggravating’ contradictions rather than seeking to simply ‘fix’ an existing system.

Junior managers: a summary

All reported on the difficulties which austerity had created, particularly falling student enrolments. All felt the merger would bring positive change but there was regret they had not been allowed to contribute to the rationalisation decisions which had followed. This aligned with a general feeling that the full range of their expertise was underutilised, a situation partially attributed to ‘out of touch’ senior managers. This sense of not being listened to, not valued, led to a drawing inwards, a tendency to cleave towards home departments and ‘ferret away’, doing good. Junior managers retained a teaching timetable and much of the ‘doing good’ they referred to occurred in classroom ‘sanctuaries’.

Criticisms of internal policy processes and structures were directed at senior managers. All junior managers reported good relationships with their (middle) managers. Similarly, even though Nigel was scathing about the capacity of some in his department, all spoke of cohesive, supportive links with their respective lecturing teams. These close ties perhaps compensate for the fact that none of the junior managers, citing time constraints, had managed to develop external or internal cross-boundary links of any note.

Lecturers

Policy

Austerity

All lecturers raised the difficult financial situation, providing many concrete, localised examples of its impact. Marcus made the following point: “I don’t even ask for training which requires money”. Jeff had been told class sizes would increase in 2018/19 because his courses did not make enough money. This was a concern to him since his students required high levels of specialised in-class support. He also noted that: “We used to be able to take the students away on a residential trip – we don’t have money for that anymore”. Betty felt her laboratory resources were outdated, forcing her to buy cheap equipment which did not give students accurate results. This is particularly troubling given that one of CAVTL’s (2013) four characteristics for excellent vocational education was the availability of ‘industry standard facilities’ (see also: BIS, 2016a, p. 66). The Catering Academy could claim excellent facilities although, even there, Adam reported that budgets were so tight, “it’s hard to manage the funding ... to make sure that we have food coming in for the classes”.

The lecturers confirmed there had been no pay rises for many years, with Adam suggesting he, “may have to look at leaving the profession and going back into industry ... as much as you enjoy doing it, the money isn’t there and there’s no prospect of moving up the ladder”. Adam did, in fact, resign a few months later.

Many brought up the loss of one-and-a-half hours of tutorial time for each group taught in 2017/18. Betty had asked the new Chief Executive why the time had been taken away: “He told us: it’s all about the money”. She understood this but maintained it was a significant loss: “we need the time ... to have one-to-ones with the learners on the timetable. We [are] expected to do it in-between our lessons”. To avoid this job expansion, she had taken time out of timetabled sessions instead. Robert described a similar response.

Most reported falling student numbers. Betty felt schools enrolled students onto inappropriate courses to retain numbers and that FE had to mop-up the consequences: “This year, for the first time, half our first years are seventeen because they failed their year 1 mock in school and have to go somewhere else”. Adam’s area – Catering – was the only one which reported growing numbers. This could be attributed to entrepreneurialism since Redgrove had recently invested in the building of a Catering Academy, in an attempt to expand.

Set free?

Responses were dominated by the internal policy context, with national policies referred to rarely. Attitudes towards the effectiveness of internal policies were mostly negative with only Jim, a Union Rep, feeling that lecturers had any discernible power to influence policy decisions.

Marcus, a maths lecturer, described policy decisions in his area as non-consultative and sometimes disadvantageous to students. For example, he was prevented from 'stretching' students who passed Entry or Level 1 Functional Skill exams early in the academic year. He would have liked to provide them with the opportunity to pass the next level in-year but was 'instructed not to' since a fail would cancel out the initial pass for achievement rate purposes. Smith and O'Leary (2013) found exactly the same behaviour in their research.

This idea that policy was driven by numerical data came up in Adam's interview. He described his and his manager's frustrations, "about all the good things that we do that you can't put on a spreadsheet". Adam gave as an example the gold medal he and a team of students had been awarded at an important catering trade fair in London. He felt that this type of activity enriched the provision, was a significant factor in achieving good retention and success rates, but often went unacknowledged:

They [senior managers] only look at a spreadsheet and the bare facts of a number. They don't really see what we do on ground level and the hard work that we put in to get the students to achieve, to get that number on the spreadsheet.

Robert described the pressure produced by being measured against national and internal data benchmarks as 'immense'. He, like so many of the research participants, felt that the culture of the College was becoming more supportive, but reported that, until recently, College achievement targets had:

Sort of aggressively been pushed onto the [junior managers] and to teaching staff. It's kinda been like, the College wants that, if you don't do it then your job is pretty much on the line. It was that type of tone.

His view was that targets were often unrealistically high but did not expect this to hold much weight: "Are we entitled to an opinion? We should but you know, it's kind of put up or shut up in that sense!".

Jim made a similar point, feeling that some managers enforced 'non-negotiated' and 'unrealistic' decisions, "in an aggressive and authoritarian way". He added that his Union duties (five and a half hours a week) were consumed by case work emanating from the 'negative effects' of this management style. His opinion was that, to survive the pressure exerted, lecturers were forced to create false pictures of the work they did,

not least because they knew 'full well' there was insufficient time to get through the work required to allow the data to tell a 'real world' story. For Jim, therefore, the vision of itself which the College presented to the outside world was 'fundamentally dishonest'. This description fits neatly into Wallace and Hoyle's (2005) 'ironies of presentation' concept: most lecturers and junior managers had numerous examples of such 'ironies'.

Jim did not feel that the authoritarian circumstances he had referred to above were uniformly the case across Redgrove and accepted that there were as many 'good' managers as 'bad', using an allusion to William Blake's (1970) 'Nurse's Song' poems to make the point: the 'Songs of Innocence' nurse is empathetic to the children in her charge whereas in 'Songs of Experience' she is repressive. The allusion is apposite since, during lecturer interviews, it was striking how often participants referred to being treated in a child-like manner: "sometimes we feel we're at school" (Sheila); "sometimes you're spoken to as if you're a naughty child" (Jeff); "I think you get a lot of slapping on the wrist if you don't do the things you're supposed to do" (Betty).

Area-Based Reviews

The merger was a source of anxiety since the re-structuring details were emerging as the interviews were taking place. Overall, however, the response was marked, as with other workforce levels, by a resignation that such 'churn' was an FE hallmark and inevitable.

There was also a sense, again in common with other levels, that the merger could be revitalising, bring in a more 'open' culture. Betty, for example, felt that, "it's going to open lots of doors for us". She was keen to visit Queensland: "see what they're doing, maybe teach sciences over there". Jim was encouraged that, with the new Chief Executive, "the emphasis seemed to be on dialogue, openness of communication". With the previous regime, he described Union meetings involving senior management as dominated by a 'culture of bullying' where people 'felt frightened to speak'.

Professional criteria

Knowledge

All lecturers were qualified to teach and mostly had qualifications which directly linked to what they were teaching. Robert and Adam, the two lecturers whose teaching was traditionally vocational, had considerable industrial experience (marketing and professional catering) although it was only recent in Adam's case. Only two, Marcus and Adam, were not graduates. Marcus was the single lecturer who was a member of

SET; the remainder had not heard of the new professional body and were not aware new professional standards had been introduced.

Regarding professional development, Adam maintained his links with the catering industry on two significant fronts, firstly through chef work on occasional weekends to supplement his income and, secondly, through the commercial work his students were involved in. He stressed that all adult learners were expected to work in the catering profession to complement their studies and this provided him with opportunities to learn:

Just working with the students keeps you in touch with the industry because they might go and work in places: 'I've seen this and I've done that!' And then you go: 'show me'. In a way you're getting like a two-way street with the students.

Adam had signed up for his teacher training qualification as soon as he was employed by the College and had now been qualified for two years. It was less clear how, as a novice, he was being supported to refine his pedagogical approach; he did refer to 'coming together' with other lecturers during CPD slots and in his staffroom but his ongoing development was mainly provided by, "just experience as you teach different lessons and different scenarios".

Marcus, as a SET member, was aware that, "there are lots of workshops and activities and external agencies doing work for our benefit, but I don't get time to go and attend". He viewed it as crucial to reach out to the wider teaching community but wondered whether these opportunities to 'collect' expertise and share it with colleagues were given enough priority by the organisation: "the priority is to be in the class and teach".

Most mentioned peer observations as helpful for CPD although opportunities to get into classrooms were sporadic. Robert, as with his line manager Nigel, spoke positively of the peer triangles which his School's ATP had set up. These triangles had been a sustained project and it was this that Robert felt was their real advantage over previous 'one-off' models:

And I've not seen them [other peers] once or twice, I've seen them quite a few times. So, I've actually learnt some things from them and, likewise, they may have learnt some good things about what I do in my classrooms.

Sheila made a comparable point, feeling that the most effective professional development she had experienced whilst at Redgrove was the unstructured peer observations she had entered into over one academic year with a fellow subject specialist. In lecturers' accounts it was often the relatively informal opportunities to talk and to share ideas which were most esteemed.

By way of contrast, Sheila found the learning walk process ineffectual, mainly because she rarely received feedback. This absence of feedback within the learning walk process was a point made by the majority of lecturers. Jeff was sometimes provided with verbal feedback but,

it's been very brief. I think for them [junior managers], a lot of the time it's 'let's tick some boxes' just to get it done because, obviously, they are under pressure to do a role, and the last thing they want to do is write-up.

Appraisals, equally, did not seem to be a process which provided much support for professional development. Sheila referred to the fact that she had kept the same development targets for several years because they had not been adequately addressed.

Autonomy

Although parts of the lecturers' professional lives were tightly coupled to a hierarchical structure this was by no means the full story, and all described expansive amounts of discretion with regards to classroom practice. Similarly, all were unfailingly positive about the support they received from the close collegial teams they worked within day to day.

Whilst Robert had felt oppressed by previous line managers, his new line manager (Nigel) was 'good' at sharing information; they were, "always talking in the office", with Robert welcoming being given extra responsibilities for Quality in his subject area. All lecturers described feeling valued and listened to by their immediate (junior) managers. Jim, for instance, who was very scathing about management styles in parts of his interview explained that: "speaking personally, my line manager is very good at liaising with staff".

Responsibility

Workloads generally seemed very heavy with everyone working through lunch-breaks and most devoting the equivalent of an extra day a week to their roles in order to 'get things done'. Adam, for example, worked straight through from 8am until 5pm every day and then ordered food for lessons from home. Additionally, he was teaching twenty-seven hours a week, four more than should be timetabled for a full-time lecturer. He described his week as 'hectic' and 'stressful at times'. Betty, recently returned from maternity leave and on a three-day week, explained that: "I have to take work home with me but then, doesn't everybody?". There is, as discussed in the literature review (Sachs, 2003; James, 2017), a tendency towards vulnerability and (self) exploitation in these situations which could be detected in a comment from Jim as he described the

effect of heavy workloads on Union members: “It’s being in this very stressful position of always having more work than you can do”.

Professional aspirations were varied but all were keen to continue to develop their professional capacity. Although Sheila had resigned from a junior manager role at Redgrove eighteen months previously, partly because, “the pressure of meeting the deadlines for what senior management needed was becoming harassment in my opinion”, she was now focused on developing her teaching to the point where she was ‘consistently outstanding’. Betty had just signed up for an ‘introduction to counselling’ programme because, “It’s not just teaching, you seem to be a bit of a counsellor for the students as well”. None saw the junior manager position as an attractive next step.

Workplace learning

Current situation

As the ‘knowledge’ section above shows, the richness of and opportunities for learning at work were inconsistent for lecturers. However, a recurring feature of lecturer interviews was the enthusiasm for expansive participation when available. Jim, for example, gave the following description of what, until recently, had been a typical lunch-hour for the lecturer team he worked with:

We had a table where we sat and ate but, obviously, we didn’t just sit and eat, we sat and talked. Some of it was banter, some of it was conversation, some of it was gossip but a lot of the time we found ourselves talking about work, because we are work colleagues. And those conversations about work, especially in that relaxed environment, came up with some creative ideas. So, the lunch-table used to be a really useful CPD session.

Timetabling and redundancies had now diminished the lunch-time get-togethers but Jim’s account is a reminder that effective workplace learning settings provide ‘designed-in’ informal access to the dialogue and practice of colleagues (Brown and Duguid, 1991; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Eraut, 1994; Fuller and Unwin, 2006; Billett, 2011). Marcus made a similar point: his maths team had recently been given base rooms to teach in which made it easier to find and support each other. Such co-operation can produce a different workplace experience to that which Robert feared to be widely the case: “Everyone sees the College as, you know what: come in, teach, assess, mark, maybe micro-manage learners and, that’s it – go home!”.

Although there were some aspects of this type of drudgery in the interview accounts, of silo situations in which support and innovation simply did not ‘flow’ (see: Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012), lecturers did not settle for such conditions. Four of the seven interviewed, for example, were studying courses in formal settings ‘off the job’ and

valued the skills and knowledge which continuing to study brought. Marcus, for example, who was studying for a degree in Education, made the following observation:

I enjoy it a lot and look forward to Thursdays, to go and meet with others. I think that replaces what is missing in my workplace, that professional discussion that I am having with my colleagues, the teachers on the evening course.

Marcus had actually spoken positively about the dialogue which was possible at work but when questioned more closely, it was clear that he was drawing a distinction between the types of conversation which different settings offered. Whilst work conversations were functional, about resources, plans and so on, the degree conversations provided a 'wider perspective': "at least I know now that my job is directly related to some policies!".

Future possibilities

Lecturers had no difficulties imagining different, better working days, when given the opportunity in interview. Robert, for example, currently had no external links with the local business community, but when it was put to him that he could play a role in enriching his curriculum through establishing such links, his response was extremely positive. Robert's background was marketing; he had the expertise to make excellent curriculum connections, but it had not been utilised. As soon as he began to imagine that external boundary crossing could be possible, Robert started to run through many creative initiatives. This was then extended into consideration of how to cross internal boundaries, including wondering whether Business and IT students could be brought together with those from Catering to design a business proposal for the College's canteen.

Lecturers: a summary

As with many at middle and junior management levels, lecturers complained of not having enough say on decisions affecting the quality and efficacy of their working lives and which, moreover, insisted upon significant amounts of unpaid labour. This sometimes meant they felt held to account by unrealistic quantitative measures. At other times, it meant putting up with authoritarian-like decisions which were not in the best interests of their students. Although this led to a view that they were infantilised there was also acceptance that austerity measures had forced the College's hand to some extent.

In common with all other levels, the merger was considered a revitalising force, not least because of the persona of Paul, the new Chief Executive, whose rhetoric was

promising positive cultural change. In the meantime, lecturers often looked to cultivate their own professional growth, with many taking on formal learning opportunities in their own time. These helped dissipate their isolation in other regards: only one had heard of the new professional standards; they rarely came into contact with other subject teams; and feedback on their practice was minimal.

Although working conditions were trying, there was a resilience in the lecturers' accounts. This was supported by the now familiar stories of the succour provided by subject or 'home' teams. It was also bolstered by the point that they were able to escape to the classroom for large tracts of their working week. The 'black box' was a space in which they could take back control.

Conclusion

With the main research question in mind, and as promised in its introduction, this chapter has presented the detailed workplace experiences of lecturers and the various management levels within the case study setting. This has been completed systematically, using the hierarchical categories. The participants' stories have been further organised by separating the data according to the three lenses (policy, professionalism, workplace learning) which act to shape the research. These lenses form the *etic* issues (Stake, 1995) discussed in Chapter Three and so needed to be prominent.

The chapter's introduction also suggested that organising the findings by hierarchical level would help to draw out differences and similarities within and between the levels with regards to the three main lines of inquiry utilised. Patterns were discernible. All levels, for example, were accepting of the ABR process and, in common, saw that it would offer challenge and opportunities. Equally, all levels recognised that work-loads were punishingly high. This did not prevent several senior and middle managers suggesting, however, that lecturers tended to coast and needed to be more professionally responsible.

It was also clear that some issues attracted sharp differences of view, not necessarily organised by level. The concept of trust was interesting in this regard, with some senior managers detecting a high-trust culture whilst others saw it as 'low-trust'. Some middle and junior managers felt they had been too trusting whilst others revelled in the close, trusting relationships they had forged with their teams


Ultimately, the choices to adopt a case study design and use the semi-structured interview as the main data collection tool, were made so that the complex and situated

perspectives of the FE workforce could be brought out and made accessible. These perspectives, the 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1973) referred to in Chapter Three, have been provided in this chapter and can now form the basis from which to proceed to a conceptualising discussion.

Chapter 5: Making sense of the FE workplace – a discussion of findings

Introduction

As discussed in the final section of Chapter Two, I intend to use the expansive-restrictive framework as a key ‘thinking tool’ to support the discussion of findings. To facilitate this, a shortened version – relative to *Table 1* – will be applied (see *Table 4* below). Although *Table 4* tends to privilege organisational features, learning through participation is implicit throughout and the horizontal double headed arrow foregrounds the dynamic influence of environment and culture (made plural below, when compared to the original, to indicate the variety of cultures and environments in the setting).



EXPANSIVE	Characteristic Number	RESTRICTIVE
Widely distributed skills	1	Polarized distribution of skills
Technical skills valued	2	Technical skills taken for granted
Knowledge and skills of whole workforce developed/valued	3	Knowledge and skills of key workers/groups developed/valued
Team-work valued	4	Rigid specialist roles
Cross-disciplinary groups/communication emerge	5	Bounded communication and work
Manager/supervisor as enabler	6	Manager as controller
Pursuit of formal qualifications valued	7	Pursuit of formal qualifications not valued/considered tangential to business need
Chance to learn new jobs/skills	8	Lack of workforce mobility
Expanded job design	9	Restricted job design
Bottom-up approach to innovation	10	Top-down approach to innovation
Formative approach to evaluation.	11	Summative approach to evaluation
Individual progression encouraged/strong internal labour market	12	Weak internal labour market; recruitment often from outside

(*Table 4*: Expansive-restrictive framework – short version – adapted from Fuller and Unwin, 2006, p. 61).

As Fuller and Unwin (2006) point out, the concepts which appear in *Table 4* are complex, 'highly contested' and carry 'ambiguous implications'. Consequently, they tend to segue into each other: an enabling manager, for instance, may facilitate frequent team-work opportunities with the express intention of finding innovative solutions to workplace problems. A vertical double headed arrow has been added to *Table 4* to emphasise the dynamic relationship between the various characteristics. To overcome the 'blurring' effect which these vertical forces bring, rather than using the characteristics to organise the discussion of findings, each set has been numbered to support iterative application of the framework's characteristics across the themed data. This follows a strategy used by Boyd, Smith and Beyaztas (2015) when using the framework to evaluate the workplace experiences of university lecturers.

The themes employed to organise the chapter are mapped out in *Appendix 7*. As with Chapter Four, they are rooted in the theoretical framework's three lenses (policy, professionalism, workplace learning) and keep the research questions firmly in mind. The expansive-restrictive framework is used across all themes to support richer interpretations. The themes are mostly built from iterative (literature informed) reading of the analytical matrices which allowed significant patterns to be identified. These were then refined via follow-up 'narrator-checking' (Mears, 2012) discussions with participants. Sometimes, however, a theme originated in striking transcript passages such as those linked to the lack of esteem some participants held for professional colleagues. Another *post-priori* theme – 'Leadership in the Workplace' – was consolidated by a document on leadership from the Chief Executive (Paul) which was distributed, unannounced, one morning at a Redgrove management meeting. It confirmed several participant accounts: that a significant cultural shift in the way Redgrove conducted its affairs was being mooted, may just be possible, and certainly deserved further scrutiny.

Two themes were *a-priori* – 'Professional Development' and 'Coping with Policy' – since it had always been expected they would be important aspects of the workplace experience; this was confirmed by the frequent references to them in transcripts. With 'Professional Development', what had not been anticipated is how much significance it would be granted by participants. It was the one main theme which required cutting by a third analytical level. 'Coping with Policy' maintained Chapter Four's organisation by level since I felt this permitted the different mediating positions within the hierarchy to emerge more clearly; this was important since one of the research questions was particularly concerned with policy mediation.

Leadership in the workplace

A vision of leadership

In a review of Further Education Trust for Leadership (FETL) research, Grainger (2017, p. 12) notes: “There are occasionally references to a type of FE that has, hopefully, largely disappeared, populated by autocratic principals and discontented staffrooms”. This suggests Grainger detects a cultural shift with regards to the values brought to leadership practice in the Sector. Certainly, at Redgrove, there was some relief that the recent merger had ushered in a new senior management regime. The ‘old regime’ was sometimes associated with ‘aggression’, with a studied reluctance to ‘genuinely’ engage with the different workforce levels. This had created a situation in which staff were reluctant to contribute in meetings, felt senior managers were ‘out of touch’ and that, subsequently, key decisions did not take proper account of context (Engeström, 2004).

The new regime, in many of the participants’ accounts across all levels, was personified by the new Chief Executive (Paul). Staff admired his ability to encourage dialogue and share issues clearly. This resonates with Briggs’s (2002, p. 76) research into middle managers which found that: “interpersonal skills, both in ... middle managers themselves and in their senior managers are highly prized” (see also: Eraut, 2004, p. 271). Paul’s approach was reified through a short ‘think piece’ entitled ‘Group culture and ethos’. The ‘piece’ was organised by the question: ‘How do we lead?’ There were various proposed answers, including: ‘no heroism; give away power and create accountability; through argument and consent’. Such documents are particularly vulnerable to ‘semantic irony’ (Wallace and Hoyle, 2005) but since interviewees were confirming a sense of positive change, of the merger’s potential to provide revitalisation, the disjuncture was narrower than might have been expected.

Characteristic six in the framework is at stake within this re-envisioning, with Paul looking to move the organisation towards the ‘manager as enabler’ pole. Paul’s approach to ‘enabling’ picks up on many threads in the literature on leadership and management. A recent paper sponsored by the FETL, for instance, emphasises that, “it is the strength to listen that matters” (Dennis, Springbett and Walker, 2016, p. 14), alongside ‘leadership of thinking’ and ‘distributed leadership’.

A ‘leadership of thinking’ approach would suggest that characteristic three in *Table 4* is also operant in Paul’s approach. Valuing the knowledge and skills of the *whole* workforce releases power and carries faith in the capacity of all levels to contribute

expert 'thinking', through democratic professional discourse. Whilst some managers did have this order of faith, several did not; this created 'restrictive pulls' within characteristics three and six.

Similarly, the phrase 'distributed leadership' provides a conceptual base from which to create a more expansive workplace environment. Paul's think-piece envisages moving away from 'transactional leadership' (Briggs, 2005; Muijs et al., 2006) into a more inclusive environment in which all levels are encouraged to take professional responsibility for decision-making and for innovation (characteristic ten). This then has implications for individual progression (characteristic twelve) and the learning of new skills (characteristic eight). Such interrelatedness reinforces the point that the different horizontal dimensions also exert force vertically through the framework, a point not commonly picked up when the framework is depicted.

Expansive leadership visions meeting context

Muijs et al. (2006) sound a cautionary note with regards to distributed leadership, warning that distributed models may involve a delegation of responsibilities rather than an adjustment of power relations. This would then involve 'job enlargement' rather than 'job enrichment', a point made by Junior Manager Rebecca in Chapter Four when complaining of too much responsibility and too little control. Lumby's (2016) view is that the term 'distributed leadership' has become so 'hybridized' it is impossible to evaluate its impact. The multiple positive claims made for it are, therefore: "the theatrical equivalent of snake oil" (Lumby, 2016, p.2) which can disguise 'persistent inequalities' in the workforce.

Whilst staff at Redgrove welcomed a new vision and tone at the top, Paul's rejection of heroism in his think piece was perhaps an acceptance that change would have to be incremental. This cautious approach accords with advice in the literature with regards to achieving sustained cultural shifts in educational organisations (Lumby and Tomlinson, 2000; Muijs et al., 2006; Hoyle, 2008). It also allows for what Unwin et al. (2007) term the 'Russian doll-like' nature of workplaces; they have many sub-cultures (see also: Bishop et al., 2006) and fractures and will not respond as one to 'affordances' (Billett, 2011). This means, "that consensus and participation have to be [carefully] constructed as a means for facilitating learning in the workplace, rather than taken as a given" (Rainbird, Munro and Holly, 2004, p. 38).

This measured approach internally is particularly important given the nature of the external pressures which continue to buffet Redgrove and the FE sector. Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2003) found, when applying the expansive-restrictive framework in

schools, that the workplace environments were framed by, “an intrusive and dominating educational policy agenda” (Evans et al., 2006, p. 53). As chapters Two and Four have confirmed, such an agenda continues to shape FE workplaces. It seeks uniformity, whereas the movement towards ‘expansiveness’ needs to, as Beighton (2016, p. 16) puts it, follow, “the contours of contexts themselves rather than try to rein them in under the heading of a single, linear journey”.

Ball (2003) describes these dominant agendas as commonly neo-liberal in nature, typically containing three key prongs: marketisation, managerialism and performativity (see Chapter Two). Whilst by no means the entire narrative, the findings from Redgrove provided many accounts of the debilitating effects of each ‘prong’. Key policy changes were not open to genuine consultation; there was divisive competition for students making sub-regional collaboration difficult; pressure to hit externally set targets led to tight command and control structures; this desire for control led to excessive demands to produce evidence; the focus on quantitative data meant other ‘harder to measure’ achievements were undervalued; this same data was used to set college sites, departments and individuals in competition with each other; sharp reductions in State funding on the one hand and continuing funding lever complexities on the other, made financial survival difficult amidst ongoing governance tensions (Newman, 2001); the financial difficulties, in turn, produced worsening terms and conditions for employees.

These policy technologies, their complementary effects:

work on individual practitioners, work groups and whole organisations to reconstitute social relations, forms of esteem and value, sense of purpose and notions of excellence and good practice.

(Ball, 2008, p. 42)

Since expansive learning environments rely on enabling social relations, Paul’s ‘think-piece’ intervention into such ‘restitutions’ is crucial if Redgrove is to be a workplace in which the whole workforce can ‘flourish and grow’.

Coping with policy

Senior managers

The overriding focus for senior managers was on ‘shoring up’ the new, much larger Group of colleges, via redundancies and restructurings; this involved a ‘turning inwards’ in the face of unstable, ‘liquid circumstances’ (Dennis, Springbett and Walker, 2016; see also: Grainger, 2017). For Redgrove, apart from the Chief Executive, who retained various external links, this ‘turning inwards’ meant that senior managers rarely crossed

external boundaries, creating restrictive pulls within the dimension of characteristic five and falling short of CAVTL's (2013, p. 26) expansive position that the best leaders, "demonstrate an external disposition". It is difficult to see how, given this 'bounded communication' environment, Redgrove's key strategic (and expansive) principles can be addressed. The following is one example, taken from the Group's Merger Consultation document in 2017: 'being a lead partner for sub-regional economic development and regeneration'.

The merger process itself, however, provided some counterbalance within this fifth dimension of the framework since it threw together a new community of practice: three senior management teams, charged with the task of merging successfully. This collaboration provided many participatory learning opportunities, including crossing internal boundaries to work on a mutual problem and form a cohesive new Group.

Middle managers

Whilst none of the middle managers had structured-in opportunities to cross external boundaries, they had sought out expansive 'learning territory' independently. Nadia's degree studies had created a confident space for critical reflection (Brookfield, 1995) in that she questioned the assumptions and power relations behind internal policy directives. Cameron (Middle Manager for Business) had built new curriculum links with local businesses, a simple 'entrepreneurial' move involving several expansive characteristics: it opened up new lines of communication; involved proactive innovation; and created added challenge. Cameron had, in fact, brought to life the 'genuine collaboration' CAVTL (2013) had hoped for in its 'clear line of sight' notion. This was a unique example, however, suggesting Redgrove had responded sluggishly to policy drives designed to align vocational curriculums with local employer demand (BIS, 2014; BIS, 2015e; Ofsted, 2016). The point that Cameron had no dedicated timetable space for such boundary crossing supports this and was one reason why his workload was unsustainable.

Middle managers seldom crossed internal boundaries. The one exception was the Quality Manager (Sara) whose role had a cross-Group responsibility designed in, an expansive characteristic which allowed her to better adapt quality policies to different contexts. The remaining middle managers had no formal opportunity to meet as a team (the restrictive end of characteristic four), learn from each other and so forge a collective response to the policy context. Since they sat in individual offices in separate parts of the building, informal collaborative learning opportunities at this level were also rare.

Relationships with the senior management team were fraught and, particularly in meetings, were often restrictive in nature. Cameron and Nadia, for instance, considered that policy reactions and initiatives were frequently simply passed down. The merger re-structuring project was given as a case in point in two interviews. These hierarchical processes carry negative assumptions about middle manager capacity (Bishop et al., 2006) and can be difficult to resist when the middle tier has no collective voice.

My own experience of attending management meetings within Forest Group, including at Redgrove, supports views that they are restrictive. The meetings follow a pattern which Maringe (2012) noted in his research on FE leadership decision-making: information giving and a series of one-to-one dialogues between a key senior figure and different middle managers. This means considerable time spent passively 'looking-on' for many and not enough utilisation of the expertise in the room or opportunity for consensual decision-making. Maringe (2012) found such patterns were often shaped by senior managers' views that middle and junior managers were too embroiled in practice to allow informed contribution to strategic policy debates, a position shared by Redgrove's Principal. In Maringe's (2012) research this confined middle managers to a 'peddling of territorial agendas' which, again, in my experience, can be a feature of Redgrove meetings. For Briggs (2005), territorialism amongst middle managers impedes the building of 'organic structures' since it creates a lack of empathy, of 'whole college understanding': products of a restrictive learning environment.

Meeting cultures like this can exclude middle managers from the key policy actor role of *narrator* (Ball, Maguire and Braun, 2012), where policy is interpreted, focus decided and attempts made to integrate new policy into 'messy' context: "It is at this stage that things can begin to 'go wrong' if authoritative interpretations are botched or misjudged" (Ibid., 2012, p. 50). Coffield (2015) makes a similar point on a macro scale, putting government reform blunders down to a sustained 'deficit of deliberation', including seeking advice from the Sector (see also: *Figure 2* in the second chapter).

The perception of being 'excluded' from key policy processes was evident in accounts from both management tiers below senior level at Redgrove. It was also clear that they were too busy to take an informed view on many policy initiatives. This submersion in practice (Freire, 1996; Sachs, 2003) is restrictive in many ways. For example: the lack of access to strategic debates makes progression (characteristic twelve) to the next level more difficult; it undervalues the considerable local knowledge (characteristic

three) which they can bring to bear (Briggs, 2002; Takeuchi and Nonaka, 2004) and which may work to reduce the number of 'botched' interpretations.

Redgrove middle managers, however, were more than 'technical conduits' (Clarke and Newman, 1997) as policy picked its way through the organisation (see also: Coffield et al., 2008; Beresford and Michels, 2014). They were, for example, sensitive to the pressures which staff below them worked under and 'brokered' deals (Wenger, 1998; Briggs, 2001) with junior managers and lecturers when policies were deemed unrealistic or did not obviously advantage learners.

Some internal policies provided little room for mediation since they pinned Schools to quantitative targets which were difficult to manipulate and avoid. In these situations, middle managers took on policy *transaction* roles (Ball, Maguire and Braun, 2012) in conjunction with senior managers: reporting and accounting for 'calculable' data. Middle managers understood the need for such roles, but transactions were an ordeal when the targets involved appeared unrealistic. In English and maths GCSE re-sit provision, for instance, the policy expectation at Redgrove was that attendance would be ninety per cent and high-grade passes would be thirty per cent (Redgrove Quality Improvement Plan, 2017/18). These policies took no account of the fact that English and maths were non-elective subjects or that high-grade pass rates would have to more than double in one academic year to meet the target (Redgrove Self-Assessment Report, 2016/17).

Ball, Maguire and Braun (2012, p. 9), citing Barker (2010), suggest neo-liberal policy technologies force practice into "the relentless pursuit of the unattainable". The target examples above involve senior managers reacting anxiously, and so in an authoritarian manner, to top down pressures from the external policy environment around English and maths data. As Felstead et al. (2011) point out, instead of looking to the workforce for a solution, an expansive response, a more common reaction is to 'tighten prescription' and try to force a solution, drawn from a narrow band of decision-makers, through the system. This creates more pressure: if this small group of senior managers cannot 'fix' English and maths results they will be compared unfavourably to other providers and to other senior teams within the Group. For Massey (2013), this creates a 'defensive culture' which permeates through settings. The final Lingfield Report (2012b) certainly found what it called 'fearfulness' in the workforce, identifying too much top-down prescription as a significant cause.

Such anxiety and defensiveness may diminish if Chief Executive Paul's 'vision of leadership' can gain traction, not least because his think-piece suggests that a new

type of accountability can be derived from the process of 'giving away power'. O'Neill (2002), cited in Coffield (2007, p. 13), has made the point that if we want, "accountability without damaging professional performance we need more intelligent accountability" and re-negotiations around what can be realistically achieved. Eraut (1994, p. 237) warned over twenty years ago that, without such negotiations, professions, "will be destroyed by the ... growth of pressures upon them".

Junior Managers

The transcripts from middle and junior management levels as well as those from lecturers revealed much closer working relationships between the different tiers than had been the case between middle and senior levels. Whenever an alienating 'they' was used to designate culpability for poor policy, this usually referred vaguely to the Government, awarding bodies or the senior management team (see also: Ball, Maguire and Braun, 2012, p. 64). This freed up relationships to a certain extent since responsibility for the oppressive nature of some policies could be located 'elsewhere'. For Freire (1996), this might suggest a lack of critical awareness regarding the potential to transform policy contexts: an 'enveloping stasis'.

However, although none of the Junior Managers could be perceived as policy *enthusiasts*, they did have crucial roles as policy *translators* (Ball, Maguire and Braun, 2012; see also: Wenger, 1998). Junior managers retained a teaching timetable, meaning they straddled the manager-teacher divide and were charged with bending policy to practice. It would be junior managers who worked with lecturing teams to: negotiate curriculum changes; chase attendance; and find time to update data records. Although middle managers provided a deal of autonomy for these translations, it was not always clear whether this was because of high levels of trust or being too busy to intervene and monitor properly (see also: Page, 2011).

This 'deal of' autonomy provides professional space for 'creativity' with regards to contextual policy responses. Such creativity was tightly contained, however, since junior managers did not meet as a level of management across Schools and were seldom invited to meet senior managers, making internal boundary crossing negligible, both horizontally and vertically (the restrictive end of characteristic five). This isolation weakens the junior managers' capacity to align local issues with broader purposes (Wenger, 1998). Such alignment is crucial for expansive learning environments since it reduces the 'tensions and contradictions' (Fuller and Unwin, 2004) which inevitably form in the 'pluralist' employment environment (Rainbird, Munro and Holly, 2004). Junior managers possessed valuable knowledge derived from their unique teacher-

manager position and detailed understanding of lecturers' daily working lives. This needed to be exploited through expansive job designs permitting 'collective brokering' (junior managers coming together) and 'multiple membership' of communities of practice across different College departments (Wenger, 1998).

Lecturers

Ball, Maguire and Braun (2012, p. 63) describe the situation of policy *receivers* as follows: "The smaller picture dominates, the bigger picture is mostly blurred and distant, managing in the classroom is the prime reality". This is an unerring fit with the policy experience of Redgrove lecturers. Apart from being occasionally exposed to 'grand policy narratives' at all-staff meetings, policy mostly found its way to them through middle and junior manager transactions and translations. The two exceptions to this in the lecturer sample were Marcus, who described gaining 'different' perspectives through 'different' conversations on his evening degree course (see characteristic seven), and Jim, whose Union role gave him 'legitimate' access to members' experiences in other curriculum areas. Wenger (1998) considered such interactions to be vital opportunities to disengage from the primary community of practice, in order to better understand it and to become more effective learners generally. 'Making sense', however, was usually restricted to tight, supportive School teams sharing the same staff-room and was not fed into College structures. Lecturers' main contribution to the 'bigger picture', in fact, involved feeding quantitative data into various quality systems (restrictive end of characteristic eleven).

Whilst such systems are valuable in helping colleges evaluate practice, "it is just as important for an organization to foster and use the experiential and collegial learning of its members" (Eraut, 1994, p. 236). It was difficult to locate such expansive feedback opportunities at Redgrove, with one lecturer describing the situation as 'put up or shut up'. Whilst there were many signs that the culture of the newly merged Group would become more inclusive, currently Redgrove tended to leave untapped the creativity and expertise which resided in its workforce, so restricting the circulation of professional capital (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). Ironically, the validity of the quantitative data which did flow freely was questioned by several interviewees since conditions of 'intensification' meant 'creative accounting' was often deemed necessary (see also, for example: Smith and O'Leary, 2013; Gleeson et al., 2015). This 'creative accounting' at Redgrove was facilitated by uniformly 'good' working relationships with junior managers who would support lecturers in their 'principled infidelity' (Wallace and Hoyle, 2005).

The notion that such 'infidelity' will always be *principled* mediation is unlikely. Page (2015), in his discussion of 'academic citizenship' (see Chapter Two) makes the point that resistance is ethical if it protects what should be the central goal of all colleges: student development and success. However, the transcripts frequently provided evidence that junior manager-lecturer 'brokering' activities did not always make best use of policies designed to improve teaching, learning and assessment (TLA). Feedback was often lacking in the wake of learning walks; appraisals were cursory exercises and not followed up; CPD slots were commandeered for other issues; and software purchased to provide an on-line toolkit for TLA was seldom accessed. There were also several instances of middle and senior levels revealing concerns about lecturers' commitment to improving TLA, sensing they were 'comfy', 'coasting' or 'stuck in the mud'.

These 'ethical' issues can be attributed, in part, to intensification (Clow, 2001; Bathmaker and Avis, 2005; Williamson and Myhill, 2008; Orr, 2013; Thompson, 2018). Certainly, for the lecturers interviewed, being 'time-poor' meant that engaging with TLA was often seen as a luxury. Trying to 'keep things going' took precedence, showing job design to be restrictive. However, a reluctance to engage with the pedagogical arm of dual professionalism was also a factor.

Transcripts did not suggest this lack of engagement with TLA was because of a lack of commitment to students but it does, nevertheless, risk limiting the quality of what is provided since practice is likely to default to 'routine behaviour' (Eraut, 1995, 2004; Sachs, 2003). If this routine is not regularly exposed to deliberation and peer review it is vulnerable to becoming, "progressively dysfunctional over time" (Eraut, 1995, p. 238). Certainly, during my occasional learning walks at Redgrove, I observed a significant amount of practice which was not functioning well. This view was shared by inspectors during the Ofsted inspection of Redgrove and was reiterated by various external reviews which the College invested in to help it respond to Ofsted's recommendations. In addition, in its most recent Self-Assessment report (2016/17), Redgrove continued to report ongoing concerns with the quality of TLA, grading itself as still 'requiring improvement'.

Ultimately, lecturers need access to the 'bigger picture' to support more purposeful and positive relationships with policy, including that which addresses TLA. This access should involve diverse opportunities to participate in 'collaborative policy learning' (Raffe and Spours, 2007). As discussed in Chapter Two, the policy learning model shares many of the expansive features of the expansive-restrictive framework. Both

emphasise, for example: boundary crossing (building relationships with other policy communities) to permit knowledge to flow. Within this flow there is an assumption that policy contestation will be encouraged so that the possibilities within situated learning (bringing the 'contours of context' to the fore) can be more fully exploited. This returns to Chief Executive Paul's 'think piece' in which he encouraged processes of 'argument and consent'. Opening-up policy processes to 'voices from below' brings new, local responses (expansive end of characteristic ten) to mediation processes. In turn, the workforce as a whole requires the time and the confidence to use this participatory learning to help forge a better alignment of goals between individuals, the organisation and its students. A stronger appraisal process and better feedback mechanisms more generally would be extremely useful in this regard (Louws et al., 2016).

Professional esteem

Hoyle (2001, 2008) sees esteem as an aspect of professional status. He uses it to consider the regard that key stakeholders have for the qualities which professionals bring to their roles. This regard comes from those whom professionals interact with most immediately (students and employers, for instance) as well as how the profession is represented through political discourse and the media more generally. Whilst this section will consider esteem as per Hoyle's usage, it will also explore the esteem which fellow professionals hold for each other at Redgrove.

Sachs (2003, p. 64) takes the view that: "improving the quality of education depends on improving the recruitment, selection, training, and social status and work conditions of teachers". This is with teacher education programmes in mind but the FE profession also needs to be able to recruit strong candidates to existing posts and then retain them. However, there is 'a declining ability' (UCU, 2015) to recruit and retain due to poor terms and conditions in the FE workplace (see also: Simmons, 2010; Keohane, 2017; Association of Colleges, 2018). This 'declining ability' was referred to several times in manager transcripts. Senior Manager Terry, for instance, wondered why bricklayers would take a College job when the cut in pay would be so marked. He also felt austerity had forced colleges into seeing staff predominantly as a 'resource' which risked a, "recruit - burn out - replace" (Ellis et al., 2017, p. 19) approach. Mather, Worrall and Seifert (2009) refer to this as 'asset sweating'. This 'burn-out risk' is also addressed by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) who warn against 'productive worker models' in education where 'human capital' is exploited and then moved on. Redgrove's Principal, Jack, considered that the kudos of the profession was currently low, that support structures for lecturers had been cut and that, at the same time, the

Sector expected much more of its staff than previously. As Ellis et al. (2017) suggest, ‘word gets out’ in these circumstances and low regard for the profession builds.

It was clear that, for some Redgrove managers, the fact that FE was, “not seen as a sufficiently attractive career option” (BIS, 2014, p. 9), had led to poor-quality appointments over recent years. Middle Manager Cameron felt his team was the weakest he had ever worked with; Junior Manager Nigel considered half of his team to be ‘very poor’; Redgrove’s Principal questioned whether his middle managers had sufficient expertise to improve the teaching and learning in their Schools.

This in-case questioning of workforce quality has been repeated frequently on a Sector-wide basis in external policy documents, a reminder of Ozga’s view that the ‘scapegoating’ of teachers is, “part of the language of policy-makers” (Ozga, 2000, p. 19). The Further Education Learning Technology Action Group found in 2014 that the whole workforce needed ‘bringing up to speed’ with regards to digital skills; the FE Workforce Strategy paper (BIS, 2014) thought that ‘too much teaching’ was not good enough; the Dual Mandate paper reported employers complaining that FE relied on, “using old equipment and established techniques” (BIS, 2015e, p. 35). If employers lack trust in the quality of the FE workforce it becomes difficult to create what the IfL (2013) termed a ‘virtuous circle’ in which employers, as well as receiving students, employees and other resources from the Sector, send their employees and resources in the other direction. Such lack of trust may be a factor in Whitehead’s (2013, p. 25) findings that: “employers are four more times more likely to use private training providers for their training needs than FE colleges”.

To compound the Sector’s difficulties around esteem, there were recurring criticisms in each annual report from Ofsted. For instance, the 2012 report questioned whether the Sector was ‘fit for purpose’. The 2013 edition stated that, “staff lacked professional expertise in working with employers and other partners ...” (Ofsted, 2013, p. 16). In 2016, the Sector’s provision was compared unfavourably to schools since students in college provision, “are much more likely to experience teaching that is not good enough and be given undemanding work” (Ofsted, 2016, p. 15). In the same year, a speech given by Ofsted’s then Chief Inspector referred to FE colleges as often being ‘large, impersonal and amorphous’. He went on to state that: “education provision, for the many children who do not succeed at 16 or who would prefer an alternative to higher education, is inadequate at best and non-existent at worst” (Wilshaw, 2016, unpaginated). Such derisory statements are difficult to fathom when Ofsted’s own data

shows that over seventy per cent of colleges were deemed to be 'Good' or better at the time (Ofsted, 2015).

This questioning of capacity sometimes appears to have roots in the point that many FE lecturers do not have HE backgrounds. Redgrove's Principal, for example, saw the graduate entry profile of school-teachers as bringing 'a certain level of qualification, intellect and training' which was sometimes lacking in FE. Ellis et al. (2017, p. 30) stress that school-teaching should remain all-graduate since this level of study produces teachers with, "the habits of mind and capacity for analysis and informed, scholarly judgement that would suggest they have the ability to continue to develop as professionals over a career". Such views imply it will be problematic for the non-graduate lecturer intake in FE to engage in the research-based development advocated by the most recent professional standards (SET, 2014) or to build 'a complex body' of formal knowledge (Freidson, 2001). Certainly, Lucas and Nasta (2010) found that many lecturers struggled with the demands of ITE programmes because of their lack of HE background.

Within these difficulties around esteem it is possible to detect the continuing impulse towards top-down, authoritative structures which work to infantilise the workforce. Lack of esteem leads to low trust and tight coupling, making models such as democratic professionalism more difficult to mould since, for instance, managers tend to 'control' rather than 'enable' (characteristic six). It also serves to diminish faith in grass roots experimentation and innovation (characteristic ten). In fact, once low esteem takes hold in a setting (or the wider policy environment), movement towards all of the expansive poles is less likely. Why, after all, would those with power see any value in it? Moreover, those held in low esteem tend to reciprocate, hence the transcript passages in this research which referred to (usually senior) managers as being out of touch and an impediment to professional practice (see also: Mather, Worrall and Seifert, 2007, 2009; Page, 2013). This type of discord undermines the democratic roots required to build effective workplace learning environments.

Professional Development

Scholarly activity

In 2014 a BIS policy paper stated that: "the 2014 professional standards will be instrumental in helping leaders, managers and teachers to improve the quality of provision and support positive outcomes for learners" (BIS, 2014, p. 10). As indicated in the literature review (Lucas, 2013; Tummons, 2014) this faith in standards is

unfounded and, certainly, very few of the research participants were aware of the current iteration. In addition, there was little evidence of the type of scholarly activity advocated by the standards and which Hillier and Gregson (2015) have suggested should form the basis for evidence-based practice and enriching HE/FE networks (see also: Ozga, 2000; Stevenson and Gilliland, 2015; Eliahoo, 2016).

This is unsurprising when one considers Orr's (2016) experience of having to change the focus of his research project because FE lecturers did not have the time to contribute to the pilot study. For Eraut (1994), the absence of scholarly activity implies lecturer reliance on a base of personal 'action knowledge' but little access to the much wider base which is the profession's public knowledge. Whilst this may allow competence for a period it risks 'dysfunctionality' in the long term (see earlier in the chapter) since practice which does not engage with research and theory is not under 'critical control' (Eraut, 2004). In turn, this means professional capacity is narrowed and underextended. Furthermore, it provides, as shown in Orr's (2016) example, little room for the development of 'knowledge exchange' between HE and the profession, impoverishing for both (Eraut, 1994; Furlong, 2008). Boyd, Smith and Beyaztas (2015) consider research skills to reside within the framework's second characteristic (technical skills valued) and so the absence of opportunity to develop these skills is deemed restrictive.

Any scholarly activity which did exist at Redgrove had been created independently by participants. Whilst individuals taking responsibility for formal study tends towards the expansive end of characteristic seven in the framework, the fact that the organisation was mostly unable to offer tangible support, introduces restrictive tensions.

Structured space for development (with employers in mind)

Links with employers in the local community, for all workforce levels, were seldom in evidence. In some regards this was due to an organisational structure in which a Business Development Unit, based at a small satellite centre, had been given most of the responsibility for developing the employer facing curriculum. The Schools at Redgrove had little contact with this Unit and so were mostly excluded from the networking opportunities within its remit. This separation was so entrenched that, until recently, it was the Business Development Unit which arranged work experience for Redgrove students, with the Schools having little input into the nature and quality of the placements and receiving no employer feedback.

Such rigid, self-contained structures are limiting in many ways (Fejes and Köpsen, 2014), not least because they work to prevent new professional models emerging.

Spours et al. (2017), for example, in their review of ABRs, suggest triple professionalism will be 'critical' if the review process is to lead to innovation and growth for the Sector rather than remain simply a pragmatic approach to austerity. The 'interconnections' required for this more expansive professionalism depend upon Redgrove and the merged Group re-thinking how their different parts connect and then reach out into context, not least by reviewing the design of their employees' working day (characteristic nine within the framework). Such re-thinking is a 'central feature' of expansive learning environments according to Lucas and Unwin (2009, p. 424) as it guards against the habit of bolting commitments onto already overcrowded working days. Middle Manager Cameron's sixty to seventy hour working week is a prime example of this. Pleas for more time and professional space are refrains in the literature. Kelly (IfL, 2012a), for example, Director of Professional Development for IfL at the time, cited Hattie's (2009, 2012) research in calling for lecturers to be given the 'space to learn'. Lingfield (2012b) issued a similar clarion call, asking that lecturers be given 'space to innovate'. Both examples are, in effect, calls for a more expansive FE workplace learning environment.

Space to learn can be informally designed-in through simply inserting lunch-tables into staffrooms, as with Jim's point (in Chapter Four) about lunch-time learning conversations (see also: Hodkinson and Rainbird, 2006, p. 170). It may extend to changing pedagogical approaches so that, for instance, blended learning can 'buy' more time away from the classroom during the working week. Initially, these learning spaces may need to focus specifically on updating lecturers' vocational profiles. As the section above on 'professional esteem' has shown, external policy documents reveal a narrative that the Sector is out of date, possibly not fit for purpose with regards to vocational education. Bailey and Unwin (2014) show that this view has a long history, recurs frequently and is related to Robson's (2006, p. 57) concern that there is no formal requirement (or opportunity) for staff, "to update their industrial or commercial expertise in rapidly changing fields of work" (see also: Esmond and Wood, 2017). This latter point is a failure on the part of the profession's 'institutional component' (Hoyle, 2008) and produces restrictive conditions in terms of the framework's second characteristic (valuing/taking for granted technical skills). It is also a reminder of Avis's (2007) idea that the vocational identities of lecturing staff are 'perishable'. Perishability was a real risk at Redgrove: Junior Manager Nigel was an Electrical Engineer but had not worked in the industry for over a decade and had no time for industrial visits; Robert had a background in Marketing but had not practised for fifteen years. Sometimes, in fact, staff taught in or managed areas which they had no first-hand

industry experience of. The Head of Business, for instance, had only ever worked in education and the same was true of Betty, a lecturer in Health and Social Care.

With industry expertise either waning or never really developed in a 'situated' manner, on top of concerns over underdeveloped vocational pedagogy (see literature review), there is a concern vocational staff will lack the 'cognitive authority' (John, 2008) and so requisite professional esteem which they need to engage confidently with employers. Such confidence will become increasingly important since the upcoming T-Level initiative, with its expansion of work experience (now rebranded as 'industrial placement') to forty-five days (BIS, 2016a), suggests that engagement with employers will assume a broader footing than hitherto, and will require vocational experts who share the 'culture and language' of industry settings (IfL, 2013; CAVTL, 2013).

As shown in Chapter Four, staff at Redgrove were overwhelmingly in favour of building expansive connections, particularly with employers. This positive stance has been noted more generally within the Sector: a 2012 research project (IfL, 2012a) involving over 200 staff in three colleges, found that industry placements for lecturers and inviting experts into the workplace were considered to be amongst the most effective forms of CPD. This broadening out of social participation is at the heart of all the 'way forward' professional models and breaks through the 'policy receiver' (Ball, Maguire and Braun, 2012) type limitations outlined earlier. Furthermore, if positive external partnerships with employers are secured, they can provide democratically forged 'bulwarks' for lecturers in the face of "political assaults on their professionalism" (Sachs, 2003, p. 15, citing Hargreaves, 2000).

Internal opportunities for development

Traditional Failings

Accounts of internal CPD at Redgrove often resonated with critical views in the literature. For example, formal internal feedback mechanisms linked to learning walks, appraisals and CPD 'follow-up' were seen by many as often absent, mostly underdeveloped and not sustained. This creates restrictions for Redgrove around characteristic eleven (formative evaluation) in the framework, since practice is not adjusted and refined as it should be. Harkin (2005) cites a 2004 Ofsted report ('Why colleges fail') to make the point that colleges will find it difficult to improve as learning organisations if they do not sustain feedback opportunities and, in the process, come to a better understanding of the impact of CPD (see also: Louws et al., 2016). Eraut (2004) sees *feedback* as a fundamental condition for learning in organisations since it

acts as the gateway to other key learning factors, including the *confidence* and the *commitment* to take on *challenge*.

Another 'traditional failing' of Redgrove's internal CPD was that it could be 'one size fits all', directed from the centre and apt to follow Hoyle's (2008) 'extended but constrained' model. Certainly, I have attended many CPD sessions at both Woodley and Redgrove which consequently fit what Kelly (IfL, 2012a) has described as a 'full rooms, empty minds' scenario. There are several reasons as to why internal CPD can be such ordeals but Lawson's (2011) point (see literature review) that it too rarely takes into account its audience's current working realities or 'existing expertise and knowledge' comes close to summing it up. This can result in contrived collegialism (Hoyle and John, 1995; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012): staff being placed, for example, into 'CPD event' groups to suggest immediate solutions to a problem which may be quite complex and which they have had little opportunity to become acquainted with. Such 'events' are driven by expansive type impulses since they seek to open-up practice but fail to take account of Senge's (2006, p. 22) point that, if decision-making is going to be released down a hierarchy, "local decision makers [need to be able to] confront the full range of issues and dilemmas".

Ignorance of existing expertise can also mean that skills which individuals particularly value remain dormant and not utilised by the organisation (suggesting restrictive pulls within the framework's third characteristic). Robert's passion for marketing and Cameron's interest in Quality Assurance are two good examples from the transcripts. This lack of awareness can lead to staff missing out on the professional development required for new roles or development within a role. None of the junior and middle managers at Redgrove, for instance, had received specialised training to prepare them for management (see also: Corbett, 2017; Thompson and Wolstencroft, 2018). This meant picking up budgeting skills, performance management skills, and data handling proficiency whilst on the job, leading to a 'sink or swim mentality' (Corbett, 2017, citing Page, 2013). Most reported that, consequently, the opening period in their new roles had been very stressful or 'Hell!' as Junior Manager Rebecca put it.

CPD sessions could also simply be 'hi-jacked' if other pressures intervened. Considering only a single hour a week was put aside for CPD at Redgrove, this 'hi-jacking' reinforced a 'poor organisational tone' (IfL, 2012b) with regards to where priorities lay (Coffield, 2008) and emphasises the point that technical skills – teaching in this instance – were taken for granted (restrictive end of characteristic two). It also evokes Fuller's (2007) point that, when considering workplace learning, it should be

remembered that the key goal of organisations is to produce 'goods and services' rather than expansive workplace learning environments; this is the default priority when organisations encounter stressful situations. Of course, expansive workforce learning environments and being more productive (however that might be defined) would ideally go hand in hand but FE, at its worst, prioritises the production of student 'through-put' (Randle and Brady, 1997; Coffield and Williamson, 2011) and the managerial strictures, such as 'teaching to the test' (Maxted, 2015), which drive the associated achievement rates; this leaves little space for expansive learning features to flourish. As Billett (2011) indicates, these stress responses produce 'core tensions' between organisational and individual goals, not least because they again remove employee 'voice' from the process (Rainbird, Munro and Holly, 2004). A banal example at Redgrove involved, with attendance rates declining in comparison to other sites in the Group, the CPD hour being cancelled so that lecturers could call learners who had been absent the previous week.

Positive CPD models

Despite the litany of failings traditional to the Sector, there were also signs in the transcripts that a more sustained, localised model of CPD was beginning to emerge. A good example of this was the peer observation triangles which had been working for about five months in one School section. These sustained triads were compared favourably to the existing Redgrove policy expectation that there should be yearly one-off peer observations (patchily observed according to Redgrove's Principal). As discussed in Chapter Four, Schools had also been assigned their own Advanced Teaching Practitioner (ATP); it was the ATP who played a key role in keeping the momentum of the triangles going. There were two ATPs at Redgrove: fellow lecturers who had been released from teaching for half of their timetables. A key expectation was that they would work closely with small teams to plot TLA developments and help drive contextualised responses to top-down initiatives. Securing a budget for these ATPs was a significant development, providing at least some promise that CPD would become a more positive experience and be: "located in what professionals do and how they do it" (Boud and Hager, 2012, p. 18).

Informal peer observations were often seen as positive forms of CPD in the transcripts. This enthusiasm for peer observation is perhaps not surprising given Lave and Wenger's (1991, p. 85) view that 'access to practice', incorporating activity and language, is central to learning. Such access informs many of the framework's expansive characteristics and places practice in a 'glass box' (Lave and Wenger, 1991,

p. 102) as opposed to the insulated black box imagined by Black and William (1998). Of course, access does not necessarily lead to better practice since a readiness to engage may not always follow (Billett, 2011). The fact that peer observations at Redgrove were mostly informal and locally negotiated rather than forced into contrived organisational schedules perhaps made engagement more likely and could explain why they were valued development opportunities.

This preference for informal opportunities fits with Eraut's (2004) concept that most learning in the workplace does not emerge from formal opportunities (the tip of the learning iceberg, to use Eraut's metaphor) but from building up reservoirs of tacit knowledge and a sense of how to use theory. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) make a similar point: it is not going to CPD events which counts but what happens in-between. This 'in-between' period, for Hargreaves and Fullan, must involve teachers having frequent access to each other and the support and feedback which this would entail (see also: Boud and Hager, 2012). The richer the social interactions the higher the stock of social capital, a key component of professional capital (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). Since different types of professional capital are mutually constitutive, enhanced social capital – with its exposure to peers' decision-making in complex social situations (what they say; what they do) – strengthens decisional capital.

It is worth noting that the peer triangles deemed such a success above were 'loosely coupled' rather than 'uncoupled' initiatives (Hargreaves, 2008) since they relied on ATPs to provide structure and momentum. As suggested in Chapter Two (Timperley et al., 2007), it would perhaps be naïve to expect such initiatives to appear organically from contexts which are subject to numerous restrictive features.

Progression (characteristic twelve in the framework)

Many interviewees were concerned about progression. This included: viewing the next level up in the hierarchy as unappealing; opaque processes around internal promotions; and feeling that the expertise required to progress was not afforded by the organisation, either in terms of advanced pedagogical practice (Robson, 2006) or in developing the skills needed to manage people (Thompson and Wolstencroft, 2015).

Hoyle (2008, p. 296) makes the point that, "a successful career in education has increasingly become signified by perceived success as a manager" (see also: Coffield, 2008). Ellis et al., (2017) suggest there has been a 'fetishisation of leadership' in education and efforts need to be made to offer attractive career options to 'lifelong teachers'. In the absence of such options, there is a danger that the status of expert teachers is diminished since, despite their excellence, they are forced into early

plateaus with regards to pay (Thompson and Wolstencroft, 2015), career development, and the power they are able to wield in a college's field of social practice (Bourdieu, 1990).

There are two key dangers associated with this plateauing. Firstly, if engaging in more learning opportunities is not likely to lead to progression rewards such as better pay or more challenging tasks, the incentive to become pedagogically expert is reduced (Boud and Hager, 2012). Secondly, plateauing conditions can mean the profession finds it hard to retain its expert practitioners. UCU (2018), for example, reported that fifteen thousand lecturers had left FE since 2008.

Conclusion

Fuller and Unwin's (2003, 2004, 2006,) expansive-restrictive framework is predicated on sets of contradictions, with the expansive poles acting to advise on which reconciliatory responses may be required and to explain current strong practice in each instance. The restrictive poles provide warnings and allow obstructions to effective workplace learning to be more easily identified. Since Redgrove as a setting exhibited many of the tensions which exist along the various continuums, the framework proved to be a useful tool in helping to make sense of the findings, not least because its flexibility allowed emerging situated themes within the case to be drawn through the template in order to support interpretations.

One such theme, 'Leadership in the Workplace', was a reminder of how important it is for senior managers to 'set the right tone' if a workplace is to build a supportive professional learning culture. This involves establishing an effective balance – with the help of all workforce levels – between the bureaucracy, the professional and the consumer (Freidson, 2001). This balance supports the construction of workplace structures which are appropriately loosely coupled (Hargreaves, 2008; Hoyle, 2008). This is a complex and difficult task, exemplified by the chapter sub-theme which considered what can happen when leadership visions meet context: expansive notions of distributed leadership reduced to 'snake oil' (Lumby, 2016) panaceas, for instance. The task is perhaps so difficult it qualifies to be classed as a 'dilemma', a term Hoyle (2008, p. 285) uses (quoting Ogawa, Crowson and Goldring, 1999) to stress that some situations cannot be 'solved or resolved' (see also: Stronach et al., 2002). This is akin to Schön's (1983) 'swampy lowlands' concept, the idea that the most significant problems of practice are enmired in opaque contexts and resist technical-rational 'high-ground' solutions, such as professional standards (which had next to no influence at Redgrove). The obligation of professionals and policy-makers, therefore, is to bring

elements of the swamp and the high ground together in order to find practical ways forward. This is akin to Vygotsky's (1987) point, cited in Engeström (2009), that the interplay of concepts following different trajectories (upwards and downwards) can lead to new, richer concept formations. The view of this thesis is that the expansive-restrictive framework can provide a useful set of bearings within this difficult topography, not least because it is sensitive to context, retains the ties between theory and practice, and offers additional horizontal learning trajectories. It provides for processes (sustained access to the practice of others, for instance) which can lay the basis for creative synergy and produce the divergent thinking (Schön, 1983, citing Schein, 1973; see also: Derrick, 2013) required within discretion and in contingent circumstances.

Discretion involves a return to issues around professions and trust (O' Neill, 2002; Lunt, 2008). The chapter's section on 'professional esteem' suggested that trust in the capacity of the Sector's workforce remains in short supply, not least within the FE workplace itself, and that the FE profession has difficulty in establishing it has the expertise to use professional autonomy appropriately. In some regards this is due to having little control over the 'institutional component' of professionalisation (Hoyle, 2008; Orr, 2008; Lingfield 2012) and thus being badly served by ITE, CPD, professional bodies and so forth. This is compounded firstly by derisive policy rhetoric which, at times, questions the profession's ethical base, and secondly by restrictive workplace settings which mean that vocational expertise withers or is never properly established. Some research participants had taken steps independently to expand their expertise via 'off-the-job' courses and, generally, once prompted, there was a strong (ethical) desire to come out of silos, take on more challenge, and not put up with: "the endless [intensive] banality of college life" (Dennis, 2016, p. 116). The challenge, therefore, is to cultivate this desire by creating the institutional spaces it will require to develop substance and agreement. This then creates the collective 'thick morality' which Apple (2004) referred to (see Chapter Two) when arguing for professionalisation derived from democratic roots. Thick morality, in turn, can help build and protect mutual professional esteem across organisational levels and external boundaries. Without this mutuality, restrictive characteristics will remain significant and impoverishing.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Introduction

The title of the thesis asked whether the workplace experience of the FE workforce might remain restrictive ‘after all these years’. In reflecting on this question, it is worth considering Illeris’s (2003) point that ‘learning by expansion’ involves ‘transcending existing limits’. More than this, it represents: “a break of orientation that typically occurs as a result of a crisis-like situation caused by urgent and unavoidable challenges, making it necessary to change oneself in order to get any further” (Illeris, 2003, p. 172). The stories coming out of the case setting suggest that, whilst there are many urgent challenges, and a continuing series of reforms designed to fix the latest crisis in economic productivity, the financial health of the Sector and so forth, the FE workforce has been unable to establish the space from which it might seek to transform itself. It is not that satisfaction cannot be drawn from the work or that creative responses are impossible, more that the workforce’s collective capacity is not properly harnessed, meaning there is not enough collaborative strength to break away from the workplace’s restrictive tensions.

This final chapter presents answers to the research questions which were introduced towards the end of Chapter Two. It also: considers the contribution the research can make to existing knowledge; evaluates the research process; discusses the impact the research has had and may continue to have within my professional role; and identifies how the findings can be disseminated so that they might, for example, be usefully compared to other settings and other professional lives.

The research questions

The lead question was as follows: *What is the current workplace experience of FE lecturers and managers?* The task of answering this was given to four subsidiary questions and it is these which are used to organise this section.

- 1. To what extent are lecturers and managers able to align their practice with core professional attributes?**

Knowledge

None of the workforce levels within the case study were able to show that their practice was secured by a strong base of propositional knowledge. Chapter Two indicated that initial teacher education provided little in-depth exploration of disciplines which might inform a professional role in education – sociology, psychology and so forth – and there

was scant evidence Redgrove had been able to compensate for this, either in structured CPD sessions or in providing space for scholarly activity. In addition, transitions into management roles were badly organised, with no training provided on theories which might inform effective management or on developing the key technical skills which the roles required.

Opportunities for informal knowledge exchange were often confined to small departmental teams and there were many signs that the intense pace of work severely curtailed opportunities for individuals to critically review practice and make effective changes. There was some evidence this was beginning to change through using dedicated Advanced Teaching Practitioners who worked with local teams to maintain CPD momentum and to allow more cross-fertilization opportunities.

Very few of the participants were familiar with the 2014 professional standards and only one was a member of the Society for Education and Training (SET). This, and SET's relatively small membership base nationally, indicates the profession is not working from any common agreement with regards to notions of 'expert' practice (see also: Coffield, 2014). This weakens claims made for dual professionalism and hampers attempts to create a triple professionalism since it reduces the cognitive authority required (John, 2008) to reach out confidently to external stakeholders.

Autonomy

Redgrove seemed to be on the cusp of change with regards to autonomy. The merger had brought in a new management regime which talked of 'giving away power', of distributing leadership, and of open-door policies. It was too soon to make a judgement on how effective this desire to provide more autonomy, more space for professional discretion and knowledge creation, would be in practice but initial responses from all levels were overwhelmingly positive. The previous regime had been associated with a tightly coupled (Hargreaves, 2008; Hoyle, 2008) approach: top-down, authoritarian, with key decisions restricted to cadres and the expertise in the wider workforce rarely drawn upon. Some participants considered this had produced a rather fearful culture and a lack of empathy between senior managers and all other levels.

For lecturers, whilst autonomy was restricted outside of the classroom by punishing requirements to update databases, mark work, provide pastoral support and so forth, they had mostly retained creative control of practice in their classrooms. Teaching, subsequently, was by far the most enjoyable (although isolated) aspect of their professional work.

Responsibility

There was an enormous amount of commitment evident with regards to 'doing the right thing' by the learners, although austerity conditions and intensification (Hargreaves, 1994; Clow, 2001, for example) often made this difficult in practice. Tutorial hours had been taken away, there was little money to update resources and nearly all participants were working many more hours than required by contract. This reliance on significant amounts of unpaid labour to 'keep things going' is not a characteristic which can be associated with a professionally responsible setting and is unsustainably exploitative.

2. How is policy currently mediated within the FE workplace?

As indicated above, within Redgrove's new management regime there is a desire to have more levels involved more often in helping to interpret external policy and design internal responses. At present, senior levels tend to make sense and pass down instructions, not least because they often feel levels below them do not have the time, are submerged in practice (Sachs, 2003). Until recently, this 'passing-down' was accompanied by a meeting culture which did not encourage discussions and refinements to what were often subsequently experienced as 'alien' (Engeström, 2004) and 'unaligned' (Fuller and Unwin, 2004) prescriptions.

Line management relationships were frequently positive and these meant that, for example, junior managers and lecturers had space to be more than passive policy receivers (Ball, Maguire and Braun, 2012). However, infidelity was not always principled mediation since it could include ignoring policies designed to improve professional practice.

For most at Redgrove, the external policy world was opaque and distant since they tended to engage with policy only after it had been interpreted and narrated by upper tiers in the hierarchy. Those senior managers charged with closer engagement were scornful of the idea that FE may have been set free by Government, citing lack of consultation in major curriculum initiatives, continuing punitive financial controls and a debilitating marketized environment.

3. To what extent might the FE workplace be considered to be either expansive or restrictive?

Since Redgrove is a complex social setting, it tended to show varying degrees of expansiveness and restrictiveness in different locations, at different levels, within the same dimension. However, a key expansive characteristic is concerned with internal and external boundary crossing since this then feeds positively into other dimensions

within the framework, such as: studying for formal qualifications; workforce mobility; and widely distributed expertise. Since Redgrove offered very few opportunities for boundary crossing, this suggests that, as an organisation, it often operated towards the restrictive end of the various framework characteristics. This was supported by poorly developed practices with regards to various other dimensions such as: formative evaluation of professional roles and distributed opportunities to respond innovatively to policies.

Job design is also crucial if an organisation is to create an expansive workplace learning environment. Although the overwhelming majority of participants wanted to cross boundaries, into peer observation or engagement with employers, for instance, their working lives were frequently far too frenetic to allow for this. By this key measure, Redgrove was restrictive since it was poor job design which led to severe limitations on the time and space required to learn and to develop practice. Again, being restrictive in this key dimension leads to restrictions in others. Managers who are unable to provide 'expansive job designs' cannot be seen as 'enablers'. Restrictive job designs can also mean that technical skills, such as research or improving pedagogy, are taken for granted or ignored since there is no sustained opportunity to engage with them.

4. How might the workplace experience of lecturers and managers be improved?

All of the 'way forward' professional models contain hope for improvement. Triple professionalism tends to distil many of the models' key characteristics, particularly in its privileging of access to richer, more varied social relations. All participants responded positively when, for example, they were encouraged to imagine ways of engaging more closely with employers. They understood that this would enrich the curriculum and offer stronger progression profiles for students. They also saw that it would help the College forge a stronger identity in its community whilst simultaneously bolstering the professional identities of those who worked within its (reimagined as permeable) boundaries. Triple professionalism, in turn, with its emphasis on, "active collaboration and democratic engagement" (Hodgson and Spours, 2015) has much in common with the expansive poles of Fuller and Unwin's (2003, 2004, 2006) expansive-restrictive framework. Both can be used to inform calls for a more sympathetic balance between supply and demand in the Sector. As Evans et al. (2010) point out, this balance relies on good quality, 'multi-faceted' relationships, forges keener professional identities, and can move the Sector away from damaging demand or supply-led models (see Keep, 2006).

Triple professionalism and expansive workplace learning environments, however, will remain impossible if job designs stay as they are. Serious thought is required on how to release lecturers and managers into the time and space required to build relations with external stakeholders and design curriculums which are sympathetically aligned with the needs of both employers and learners. This will involve adopting different pedagogical and management approaches so that, for example, those involved in delivering the curriculum are not in isolating 'black boxes' for twenty-three hours a week. This could include more imaginative use of blended learning strategies via flipped learning, for instance, or utilising more structured and formative virtual learning environments. It could also simply involve making increased use of collaborative group projects and allowing student teams to work independently at certain points in the week or on 'live projects' with employers.

Despite ongoing financial difficulties, colleges must also invest in creating posts which carry distinct responsibilities for cultivating and sustaining connections, rather than bolting these onto existing job roles. Their ability to do this was bolstered recently with the Government (DfE, 2017) announcing it would make a £50 million Capacity and Delivery Fund (CDF) available to providers piloting the new T-Levels. Forest Group subsequently drew down £500,000 of additional funding (Redgrove College Management Team minutes, June 2018) for the 2018/19 academic year and has used some of this to appoint three employability managers and three work experience administrators across the Group.

This additional funding may well signify that austerity conditions are beginning to loosen, with the Government recognising the Sector cannot meet its key skills' mandate (BIS, 2015e) with current levels of investment (see also: Augar Review, 2019). For Redgrove, the strategic stimulus of the CDF has already led to encouraging signs that, given the right levels of support, it can become the dynamic nucleus of its local community which Sharp (2011) envisaged. In the short time that Redgrove has possessed an Employability Manager (appointed in August, 2018), over a hundred new employers have committed to providing support to enrich the curriculum. This includes: offering industrial placements (forty-five days in the academic year) for T-Level pilots; coming into classes to talk through their expectations and the opportunities they can offer; committing to reciprocal 'live' projects with, for example, media students producing a promotional video for a Construction company in return for the firm running free bricklaying master classes to Construction students. In addition, the CDF has paid for more time to cultivate existing links: the relationship with the local premier ship football club had lain dormant for some time but during the 2018/19 academic year, the

Sports Diploma students have toured its facilities; a competition has been set up to win short internships; and the club's coaches have agreed to deliver short practical sections of the Sports curriculum. If Redgrove can continue to build such partnerships it can then begin to take on an influential networking role, become the hub where employers and other stakeholders congregate to 'connect-up' with each other and with the College's workforce. This then begins to resemble the 'flourishing' workplace (Ball, 2013) imagined at the beginning of this thesis.

Contribution to education research and knowledge

FE has been a turbulent world for a quarter of a century but the depth of funding cuts since 2010, the range of new curriculum initiatives and the significant re-structuring of the Sector through the Area-Based Review process, suggested it was an opportune time to 'take the temperature' of the FE workforce, try to understand what it was like to work in such a challenging environment. London, alone, for example, had forged eight new college groupings by April 2018 (Spours et al., 2018). This amount of organisational change brings new relationships, opens up new possibilities whilst sealing off others. Since Redgrove was at the heart of a significant merger, it offered a unique insight into what impact such new configurations may bring for managers and lecturers.

This research project, then, has been able to provide an up-to-date and in-depth snapshot of the effects of policy in the FE workplace and what this might mean for professionalism and workplace learning. If the turbulence described above is to bring beneficial effects for the profession and the stakeholders it works with, then it is vitally important its impact on colleges is thoroughly understood. This case study makes a contribution to developing such understanding. Furthermore, it does so by taking a relatively novel approach to evaluating an FE college since Fuller and Unwin's (2003, 2004, 2006) expansive-restrictive framework has been rarely applied to FE settings.

The thesis has also served to highlight that some issues remain damagingly intractable in the Sector. Hargreaves (1994), for example, warned many years ago that intensification was 'eroding' the quality of professional working lives in education; Clow (2001) highlighted its pernicious presence in FE specifically and this was confirmed by a recent UCU Workload Survey (2016). The research participants in this case study complained persistently of the relentless and conflicting demands on their time and the impact this had on their ability to extract satisfaction from work and 'do the right thing' by their learners and other stakeholders. The research is a reminder that intensification must be addressed urgently if the Sector and its colleges are to be creative and vibrant

'players' within the various eco-system levels (Hodgson and Spours, 2013b) which surround them and form the workplace.

Evaluation of the research

Whilst using three lenses (policy, professionalism, and workplace learning) to explore the case setting allowed the thesis to show their mutual shaping influences and build complexity, it also created challenges. The literature review, for example, had to do justice to the corpus of work from three key areas. These then had to be integrated in a balanced way into the interpretative process as the findings were discussed. This needed careful calibration and review, not least because I was also looking to involve all four workforce levels within the research. Many EdD research projects focus on one (for example: Lloyd, 2018).

My insider role in the research brought both advantages and disadvantages (see Sikes and Potts, 2008). A key advantage was that, as a moderately powerful insider, I was in a good position to open up debate around the findings and then steer and help sustain subsequent changes to practice. This is particularly important in FE settings since the pace is so frenetic that many initiatives, no matter how appropriate, are forgotten about or simply abandoned the moment they encounter difficulties. My insider status also carried certain tensions. In adopting a dual role (Smyth and Holian, 2008) – middle manager and researcher – I interviewed participants beneath and above my level in what had been, until recently, an authoritative and hierarchical setting. This meant that relations of power were an inevitable factor in what was discussed or revealed. I tried to ameliorate this by not basing the research on my home site, but the dual role may have meant key issues were left unsaid.

Finally, although the expansive-restrictive framework was a considerable aid to the research, it also presented built-in difficulties. For instance, not all characteristics in the framework carry equal importance with some serving as root processes which then branch out into and shape other processes: 'expanded job design' is a prime example. This is a currently under-theorised aspect of the framework with its various iterations focusing solely on the dynamic between sets of opposites across horizontal axes, thus ignoring the vertical forces which these 'root processes' bring to bear. As Fuller and Unwin state (2011, p. 51), the framework's separate features must be 'taken together' but there is limited advice in the literature on how to accomplish this.

Impact on professional role and case study setting

The thesis set out to 'better understand' what it was like to work in an FE college, and provide 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1973). However, it also took the view that case studies should be, "a step to action" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011, p. 292), in sympathy with Freire's (1996) concept of praxis. As the thesis progressed I was able to begin to use my middle management role to open up discussions around the insights which were emerging and to support expansive changes to practice developed by the merged Group.

These changes have included: a considerable reduction in the occurrence of one-off transmission-like CPD events; much more emphasis given to allowing local teams to create inflected responses to policy issues; setting up matrix groups which include staff from all colleges within the Group and which meet twice a term to clarify and grapple with issues within their specified area of interest. There is an HE matrix, a Programme of Study matrix, and so forth. Their multi-level nature makes it more difficult to simply blame 'other' levels for workplace difficulties whilst simultaneously exposing participants to the contradictory tensions and demands inherent in workplace activity (Engeström, 2009). In Engeström's (2009) research, such exposure has the potential to 'trigger' expansive learning. If this is to be the case with the matrix groups then they will require ongoing support to help them heed Sachs's (2003) warnings that, for professional collaboration to succeed, the power relations involved need to be carefully addressed.

The fact that Redgrove was going through a merger which, just as the thesis was concluding, resulted in major structural changes, opened up richer opportunities for 'impact' than might otherwise have been the case. For example, space was created in the new structure for employability teams at each site within the Group. This was ultimately made possible by a new funding stream but the process helped establish the principle that discrete teams with protected time and space would be needed to help the Group engage properly with major new policy directions.

A final key point with regards to impact is that the thesis has provided an opportunity for me to contribute to and help develop a more critical interrogation of what the Group claims for itself with regards to internal policies. There is now more careful examination of the rhetoric used when hierarchical levels provide 'policy narrations' (Ball, Maguire and Braun 2012). If the organisation's new management regime, for instance, is going to promulgate distributed leadership, it needs to first engage with the point that such approaches can often lead to expanded responsibilities (Muijs et al., 2006) and not be

particularly empowering. Additionally, advocating an open-door policy must take into account that such claims fall foul very quickly to semantic irony (Wallace and Hoyle, 2005) since all colleges – without exception in Maringe’s (2012) research – assert the inclusivity of their working cultures, often to the surprise of those who work there.

Dissemination and development of findings

The findings of the thesis have already been used to inform discussion and change practice within my workplace, as described above. This will continue; there are plans, for instance, to re-design the learning walk process so that feedback is more clearly integrated and support more sustained. In addition, Chapter Two was used recently as the basis for a Saturday School lecture at Canterbury Christ Church University.

Given that the expansive-restrictive framework has been used only seldomly to scrutinise the FE workplace – O’Leary’s 2013 research into observation processes is one of the few examples – there may be potential to adapt aspects of the thesis for journal publication. This worked successfully for Boyd, Smith and Beyaztas (2015) when using the framework to explore HE workplaces.

There is also scope to use journals and conferences to more fully explore the concept of triple professionalism as a ‘way forward’ model for the profession; it adopts many features of other influential models and has particular current resonance given present policy direction (pan-London approaches; ABRs; industrial placements, and so forth). The triple model’s relevance to further explorations of FE workplace settings is strengthened by the often unacknowledged point that, whilst the IfL advocated dual professionalism up until its demise, the figure typically used to illustrate the dual nature of expertise was clearly relying on a third dimension of professional practice without naming it (*Figure 6 in Appendix 10*). Interestingly, the figure struggles to accommodate the shaping forces of context and its various connecting elements, so illustrating that expansive environments, which align with triple professionalism, risk producing workplace settings which are ‘toxically overwhelming’ (Boyd, Smith and Beyaztas, 2015). Using conferences to tease out and address these risks with other practitioners and researchers, may help cultivate protective strategies.

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Appendix 1: Freire’s characteristics of oppression in an FE context

The table below is an adaptation of a list of teacher-student ‘poles of contradiction’ which Freire (1996) provides on page 54 of ‘Pedagogy of the Oppressed’. This table replaces teacher with manager and student with lecturer but otherwise mostly leaves the descriptions intact.

The binary nature of the model places an unrealistic cloak of simplicity over context but, as the literature reviews have shown, these ‘oppressive’ relationships do frequently arise in FE settings. In Freire’s terms, the next step is to find ways to reconcile the contradictions. The ‘way forward’ models of professionalism and Fuller and Unwin’s (2003, 2004, 2006) expansive-restrictive framework can, then, be interpreted as reconciliatory initiatives.

Managers lead	Lecturers follow
Managers know everything	Lecturers know nothing
Managers think	Lecturers are thought about
Managers talk	Lecturers listen (meekly)
Managers discipline	Lecturers are disciplined
Managers choose and enforce their choices	Lecturers comply
Managers act	Lecturers have the illusion of acting but the parameters for action are set
Managers choose working procedures	Lecturers (not consulted) adapt
Managers confuse authority of knowledge with authority granted by hierarchy	Lecturers’ freedom subjugated by such authority
Managers are subjects in the workplace	Lecturers are ‘mere’ objects

(Table 2: Freire’s characteristics of oppression in an FE context)

Appendix 2: Colour coded extract of interview transcript

The colours correspond to initial separation by theme and are explained below:

- Policy (austerity)
- Professionalism (autonomy)
- Workplace learning (current opportunities)
- Policy (set free?)
- Policy (ABR)

I And do you do the extended BTEC?

N Yeah, we call it the one year diploma in Year 1 and extended diploma in year 2.

I Do most of them progress on from year 1 to year 2?

N Well, another thing to do with funding at the College is they want us to push everybody through but last year we had quite a cull. We had 2 90 credit groups and we merged that into one group of 24 and although that's a large group we really were selective. The attendance of that group is 95%. The best in the College.

I And did you get support to do that? That's a lot of funding isn't it? Were you allowed to do that?

N Yeah – the assistant principal, he's been very good actually – he said if that will get the best results then do it.

I That's good – what about the merger, which comes out of the area review process? What's your view of the merger now we have this 4 site group?

N It's a good opportunity to learn from the other colleges if we can get the right people to go out see where they're doing really well, take those experiences and bring them back, take teachers to Queensland. If Queensland are getting the best results what are Queensland doing different to us? Can we incorporate it into what we do? I understand that people have got to make decisions on curriculum planning about what's delivered where but I also think those decisions are made by the wrong people. They might be for the right reasons. I think the input for those needs to be spread a bit, a bit further.

I Have you got an example of that not working?

N I dunno – I suppose all of our plumbing is going to go over to Xxxxx and all the Electrical Installations is going to come here but I think we're far enough apart to both run it. I know it's a financial decision, a financial thing that they're merging together. I suppose they're going to put all the plumbing in one place and they'll be a reduction in staff. I think the 2 colleges are very different to each other and we produce some very good electrical and plumbing students from here. I'd have like to see it expanded here, really. I don't know how that will work.

I Did you get any input on that?

N No.

I You were just told it was happening?

N Yeah, and now I'm being told this workshop is going to be for art and design and I'm like wheeey. Great – so I'm being moved out of one of my workshops. Art and design is coming here. I could give some good ideas into stuff like that.

I Have you had a chance to go over to Queensland yet?

N No, but the guy who introduced me to teaching all those years ago – he's the head of Xxxxxx at Xxxxxx so I pop into Xxxxxxx quite regularly, go over for a meeting and go for a couple of pints.

I Have they got a big offer in your subject areas at Queensland?

N I think so – yes, but I've had very little involvement with Queensland

I So have they got an Electrical offer over there?

N I don't know, but they've got Engineering.

I Ok – internal policieserrrr....what's your view on learning walks?

N I'm banging my head against a wall a little bit. I think learning walks are a much better system than observations. There was a point when everyone was used to me being in and out of the classrooms, doing a learning walk – they were very comfortable with it. Then Xxxxx has become involved and Xxxxxx does some learning walks but he doesn't upload his learning walks to the learning walk system so we've got his learning walks sitting there and mine sitting here. Then we had the recent IQAR – those learning walks, I don't know where they are

I Oh, so you've had no feedback from those?

N No, nothing at all.

I Or seen the reports?

N No, I think the teachers are very resentful of that because they'd done so much work, so much preparation. I actually think the presentation for that was fantastic, and they've had nothing at all. And then where somebody has a poor learning walk or a poor observation for whatever reason, they're then set targets and when we had pro-observe – I hated pro-observe coz it was so clunky to use but at least we had somewhere to say, there's your observation there, that's your outcomes, here's your targets and when and how we're going to tick 'em off. And I could go through that process and tick em off – now I haven't got anything. They've said there's this new software coming out but it's not here yet. So, to be honest with you my learning walks have more or less dried up at the moment because it's justvery fragmented at the minute.

I Yeah it's very tick boxy and there's nowhere to put your actions.

N Yeah and I'd like to see --- Xxxxx comes back with some great points. I'd like to see it all in one place and from that one place then we can move it forward.

I Ok, what's your view on pro-monitor and those types of databases we're asked to maintain?

N I think it's a fantastic tool – absolutely fantastic. As we were discussing: 20 years ago there was nothing like that was there? I don't mind being data driven as long as they look at the stories behind the data. And I do think pro-monitor ...this is the first place I've used pro-monitor. You have to get used to using it. You have to put everything on there. You've got everything sat there – so if a student's got 50% attendance You've got to go deeper. What's the teacher done about it? What's the reason behind it? Oh, been in hospital for 3 weeks. If you use it well it's a fantastic tool.

I Do you think your lecturers use it well or

N They use it to varying degrees. Again, it's a thing of time – it's quite time-consuming. If they were given more time during the week then they would use it more. And definitely at the start of the year – you need curriculum time to get all this set up before you start but, typically, we're interviewing and that takes up all the time prior to starting. This year – slightly to do with funding – for the level 3s. The level 3 is 540 guided learning hours but the College has only given me 414. There's 9 units and if you run 9 units over 36 weeks it slips straight into 540. 414 on the other hand leaves me short. I can still run 9 individual units - I reduced it to 30 weeks. Which means at the end of the academic year we're going to have at least 4 weeks when the teachers aren't teaching but it's a fantastic opportunity for me and them to just get everything in place for next year.

I And they're ok with that above you are they?

N Yeah, the assistant principal has supported me in doing it. He's said to me if that's the way you want to run, give it a go and we'll have a look.

I Sounds like a good idea to me.

N Some of the things we've planned for that time already – is that all of the year 1s who'll be progressing, we'll have UCAS workshops so we'll start their UCAS in June and that'll be ready for September.

I So how was itwhen you go into meetings with senior managers how does that go? Do you feel you've got a good relationship with the people who manage you? Is it a high trust or low trust relationship would you say?

N I think the trust is improving. At our last MOT the experience was pretty good. I think Xxxxx said 'how confident are you with these numbers?' and now he's starting to trust my confidence in my data so it was a very soft touch last time – and, basically, if you can deliver these results then we're looking at a good across the area so he didn't push too much on that, I don't think.

I Ok, and have they been tougher before that?

N Definitely, yeah.

I Why do you think that was?

N I think when I first came here it was like a dream come true really. It was very relaxed – people were just ticking along – it's fine, don't worry. Can you do this? If you can't do it then don't worry about it. I couldn't believe it to be honest with you. I've always been the sort to push, push, push. And the management systems were very friendly at that point. If I'd wanted to make a complaint or

highlight something that wasn't quite right there wouldn't have been anywhere for me to go. Now I feel there probably is – there's not as much nepotism as there was before.

I What made that change do you think? Was it a change in personnel?

N Yeah – change in personnel.

I Was it Xxxx coming in?

N I think Xxxxx and Xxxxx leaving. Xxxxx going and being replaced. It was a short-term replacement of the assistant principal/head of school at the time but it actually made quite a bit of difference really. He came in and he trusted us from the off to be honest with you. He's quite good at – he's given Xxxxxx and I quite a bit of free rein to how we manage our areas. Of course there are things that we have to do and if we do those things, I think he's quite good at trusting us

Appendix 3: Interview schedule

Opening

Introductions: my role; the nature of the research; final check-through that all is clear from the information sheet, including re-confirmation of confidentiality; ask for permission to record.

Fact gathering warm-up: responsibilities in setting; length of time in the profession/current role/ with the College. QUALIFICATIONS – ITE AND CURRIC staff survey results over last few years – bring up

Policy (keep in mind: key policy technologies - marketisation, performativity and managerialism)

Which current gov't policies are you aware of? Any detail? T Levels; Apps (levy included); English and maths; Area Reviews Prompt if needed

The Govt has spoken of setting the Sector free – do you think colleges have more freedom today than, say, 5 years ago?

Govt has asked colleges to pursue independent income streams – be more entrepreneurial. What possibilities do you feel there might be in this area? Employers? WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE INVOLVED? Examples in your area?

The College has just been through a merger process – do you think this will be something which benefits students/staff? Dangers/opportunities? Any change to your working day yet?

How would you describe the style of management in the College? Do you consider the College to be a democratic workplace? (dialogue; access to info; mutual decision-making; acknowledgment of wide spread of expertise). Do you feel your contributions are valued? EXAMPLES. Do you want to contribute? Is your point of view valued?

What's your relationship like with your line manager/other managers? Solve things together?? TOP-DOWN?? View of managers – at top and immediate? Skilled? In-Touch?

Do you get much say on the following:

Learning walks (negotiated? Just turn up? Supportive? Feedback? Springboard for professional dialogue? Primary function = auditory evidence or teacher learning?)

Changes to observation schemes (move from grading/senior team) – views?

Pro-monitor use (setting targets; putting disciplinary comments on) – a good tool?

Appraisal approaches – helped you to develop?

Your timetable – do you have any control over it? Is there flexibility?

Meeting agendas/scheduling/conduct – what is the tone? Comfortable?

Curriculum offer (quals offered; how assessed; how delivered (hours/strategies). Views on its appropriateness? Getting better/worse?

Teaching quality docs: LPs, Schemes, Context sheets (WORTHWHILE? RATIONALES GIVEN? RATIONALES ACCEPTED?)

We are considered to be RI by Ofsted? Thoughts? Important to you? Did you read the report?

Workplace Learning – using the expansive/restrictive continuum (some aspects covered under 'Policy' and 'Professionalism').

Can you describe the types/frequency of communication which you enter into with:

- Colleagues within your School (department) TEAM WORK?
- Different Schools (departments) TEAM WORK?
- External contacts/stakeholder

Do you get much chance to learn new things at work/associated with work?

- CPD internal – WHAT'S YOUR VIEW ON HOW THIS IS RUN – GIVE EXAMPLES. - Any fresh perspectives brought in? Do you run any? FORMAL/INFORMAL??
- CPD external – SET UP FOR YOU/ENTERED INTO YOURSELF? Off the job time recognised?
- Actual courses/formal quals - details
- Any new roles? Imposed – voluntary. Supported or thrown in? Sink/swim?

What are the issues? TIME; SKILLED FACILITATION; NOT ENOUGH TO BE BROUGHT TOGETHER; SEE THE VALUE – FOR THE ORG OR FOR STUDS OR SELF? Examples ...

Are you encouraged to learn and develop (NEW SKILLS/APPROACHES)? Examples re yes/no

Professionalism (bring in models: activist; triple; ecological democratic)

Autonomy (in the classroom (1); in the College (2))

How much freedom/discretion do you feel you have during your typical working day? What about lecturers? In THE CLASSROOM? Coming and going? LUNCH? IN-COLLEGE time (disrupted? Able to organise as see fit?). Electric calendar insisted upon? MEETINGS IMPOSED? GET IN WAY. OPEN DOOR STAFFROOMS?

FLEXIBLE WORKING PATTERNS?

Would you describe the culture here as one of high or low trust? EXPLAIN – GIVE DETAILS

Learning walks? Supportive? Surveillance? Better/worse than graded? Much reporting upwards?

Responsibility

Do you feel able to 'speak-out' if you feel there are issues which need addressing? BE listened to? Cause trouble for you? HR ON-SIDE? NEUTRAL? MANAGEMENT TOOL?

What steps do you take to develop as dual professional? GET BETTER at TEACHING? KEEP UP TO DATE with curriculum?

How in control of your workload do you feel? ABLE TO MANAGE? Able to say no? Set own deadlines. Feel stressed by work? Always? Sometimes? Trigger POINTs? ANXIETY? Work NEVER DONE? Keep to contracted hours? TAKE LUNCH?

ADMIN SUPPORT – EXAMS/ENROLMENT/STATUS CHANGES? Freedom to get on & teach?

Are you a member of any union? SET? Heard of SET? Any membership of any org or network? Details?

Ethics – able to act ethically?

Knowledge

Explain concept of dual professionalism – to what extent do you consider yourself to be an expert in your subject/as a teacher and/or manager? Any view on subject specific pedagogy? CPD? Reading? Updating? Do you get to design your scheme? Room to innovate (TLA strategies; assessment opportunities)?

Does the College support you to develop further professionally? Do YOU GET AS MUCH OPPORTUNITY AS THOSE ABOVE YOU? Are you valued (its relative) by those around and above you? DETAILS ...

Do you feel that there is sufficient expertise in the lecturing workforce? Your colleagues?

DO YOU FEEL YOUR EXPERTISE IS DRAWN UPON PROPERLY BY THE ORG? More to offer than asked for? Any initiatives which are bottom-up? YOURS?

CAREER PATH – what's open to you? Interested in progressing? Internal opps?

Closure

Finish with a general question: any recommendations for improving practice which didn't come up? Anything else important which hasn't arisen?

Thank participant for their time – provide reminders about what happens next. First: transcript to be sent; once read - opportunity to add to, ask for data to be withheld, point out issues with confidentiality. Second – follow-up narrator check if agreed to be useful/time.

Appendix 4: Single case thematic matrix (extract) – supports Chapter Four (Table 5)

Junior Manager: Nigel					
Professionalism			Policy		
Knowledge	Autonomy	Responsibility	Austerity	Set free?	ABR
Supportive of ATP role and close work with teams (learning walks) – needs to be more joined up, though.	Line manager: gives 'free rein'; linked to regime change	Not enough time to maintain databases Trust: improving (JM to MM)	Funding for ESOL Engineering disappeared	'Big fan' of pro-monitor' – structures information.	ABR process: feels resulting merger is an opportunity – get to Queensland, learn from their practice.
Critical of capacity of some lecturers in team ("not proper teachers"; "wouldn't mind losing half of them".)	Above extends to curriculum changes and timetabling, including own hours.	Assists avoidance of 'unrealistic' policy processes – lesson plans. Management levels above can "forget where came from" (out of touch)	Funding – WEX underfunded (one WEX officer)	Still too many qualifications 'out there'.	ABR: concern that rationalisation will impoverish curriculum offer
Own subject specialism – difficult to maintain. No employer links. Used to be external moderator for BTEC – gave up.	Space for creative control with section though wants more input on CPD	Loves teaching...		Appraisal system – doesn't work. Just a tick-box.	Regime change: management now more responsive. More able to 'fix' things. Too relaxed before
Schools 'much better' re focus on pedagogy.		Lunch-hour sacrosanct; keeps to hours – in control of hours		In favour of top-down switch to learning walks – critical of poor action planning	Regime change: now allowed to recruit responsibly
CPD – poorly organised. Should be teacher driven. Wants to understand data systems better		BUT days jam-packed and often loses sight of plans. Firefighting regular feature. No time to develop resources			

Appendix 5: Condensed case thematic matrix (extract) – lecturer version – supports

Chapter Four (Table 6)

Themes	Data	Participants
Policy (set free?)	Little detail on external policy – internal policy dominates	All
	Treated like children (infantilization) – note nurse’s song example (Ji)	J, B, Ji, Sh, M
	Interference in pedagogical decisions – exam entry example (M)	M, Sh, J
	Focus on tight quantitative measures	Ji, A, M, B, Sh, R
	Aggressive top-down context – Union work example (Ji)	Ji, Sh, Ro, Ad
	Some voice to feed back	Ji
	Lack of voice in shaping policy	R, B, Sh, J, M, A
Policy (austerity)	Lack of money; impoverished curriculum (resources, trips, class sizes, tutorials ...)	J, B, A, R
	Wage not a fair return	(all bar M)
	Reduced student numbers	R, B, J, A, Ji

Appendix 6: Condensed case thematic matrix (extract) – supports Chapter Five (Table 7)

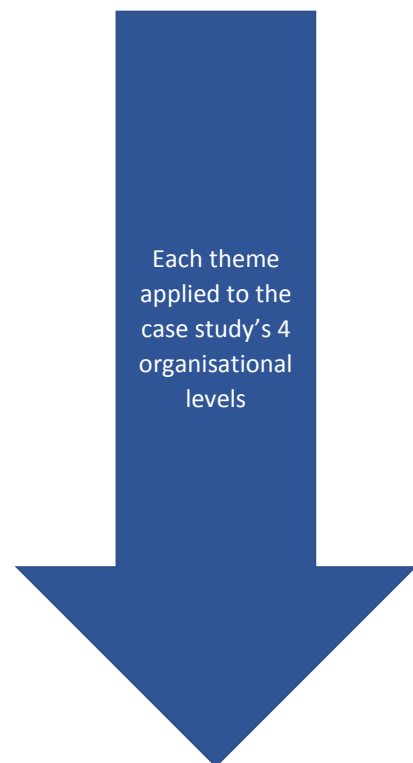
Themes	Data	Participant (italics signify documents)	Expansive-restrictive framework link
Leadership in the workplace	A vision of leadership	Old regime closed off – distant – change needed	6, 3, 10, 12, 8
		Old regime: poor meeting culture – change needed	
		Pa’s interpersonal skills particularly admired	
		Revitalising new regime (personified by Pa)	
		Investment in (not money!) and trusting of staff’s professional capacity	
Vision meets context	Danger that responsibility not power distributed – inequalities therefore persist	Sh, Ni, Ro, Na, Re, Sa, Ca, Br, Sh, Ad. Be, Ji, Ni, Re, Na, Sh, Ca. Ja, Te, Ca, Sa, Br, Re.	6 dominant; 9 will need to be addressed re solution
	Redgrove already too busy – incremental approach required	Sh, Ro, Be, Je, Ma, Ji Ja, Te, Ca, Sa, Br, Re.	
	Redgrove badly affected by policy technologies – work against loose structures required by vision	Sh, Ro, Be, Je, Ma, Ji, Na’. <i>Pa’s ‘thinkpiece’; rhetoric in College SAR; Pa.</i>	
		Re (particularly) but all JMs and MMs concerned/working excess hours (not Ni). Intensification reported by all.	
		Refs across all levels: markets, managerialism, performativity	

Appendix 7: Thematic maps

Two thematic maps are provided here. Although Chapter Four’s main task was to present findings, analysis was already beginning to take place and so this is captured below. For both maps, ap (*a-priori*) signifies a theme which had been established before the research whilst pp (*post-priori*) shows that the theme became significant during the processes of the research. In the Chapter 4 thematic map, for instance, although policy was always conceived of as a key main theme, it was not until interviews were under way that that it became clear that ‘being set free’ would be seen as significant enough by participants to form a sub-theme. The approach aligns with Miles and Huberman’s (1984, p. 24) concept of a ‘concurrent flow of influences’ within data analysis, referenced in Chapter Three.

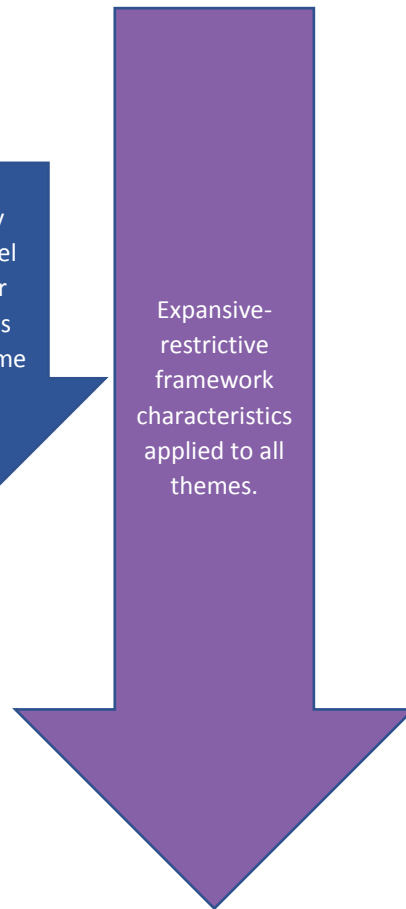
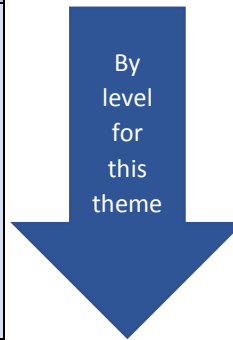
Chapter Four: thematic map (Figure 4)

Main theme	Sub-theme
Policy (ap)	Austerity (ap)
	Set free? (pp)
	Area-Based Reviews (ap)
Professional criteria (ap)	Knowledge (ap)
	Autonomy (ap)
	Responsibility (ap)
Workplace learning (ap)	Current situation (ap)
	Future possibilities (pp)



Chapter Five: thematic map (Figure 5)

Main theme	Sub-theme	Third level
Leadership in the workplace (pp)	Vision of leadership (pp)	
	Vision meets context (pp)	
Coping with policy (ap)		
Professional esteem (pp)		
Professional development (ap)	Scholarly activity (pp)	
	Structured space (pp)	
	Internal opportunities (ap)	Traditional failings (pp)
		Positive CPD models (pp)
	Progression (pp)	



Appendix 8: Research information sheet

Institute of Education



Participant Information Sheet for Interviewees

Title of Research – The Current Workplace Experience of Further Education Lecturers and Managers: Still Restrictive After All These Years?

Name and Contact Details of the Researcher: David McClymont –
[REDACTED]

1. Invitation Paragraph

You are being invited to take part in a research project as part of my Doctor in Education (EdD) studies. Before you decide whether to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. You are welcome to contact me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

2. What is the project's purpose?

The purpose of the research is to gain a better understanding of how colleges cope with the demands of external policy directives. Linked to this, it is also looking to explore the extent to which the FE workplace is a setting in which key professional attributes (expertise, autonomy and responsibility) are protected and developed.

3. Why have I been chosen?

The research project will involve seventeen interviews. All interviewees will be employed by the College. The aim is to interview a range of managers at different levels in the organisation as well as a broad selection of lecturers, working in different Schools. This will provide a detailed set of various perspectives and experiences.

4. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form). You can withdraw at any time without giving a reason. If you decide to withdraw you will be asked what you wish to happen to the data you have provided up to that point.

5. What will happen to me if I take part?

You will take part in an interview which will last around one hour. I will audio record the interview and type up a full transcript. This transcript will be sent to you so that, if you wish to, you can check through, add any further comments, and re-confirm your permission for the information to be used in the research project.

6. Will I be recorded and how will the recorded media be used?

The audio recording of the interview and the transcript associated with it will be used only for analysis and for illustration in the written thesis. No one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recording and transcript.

7. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

I don't foresee any disadvantages or risks in you taking part in the research.

8. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will provide an opportunity to take time to reflect on the workplace context and to consider how the experience of work may be improved.

9. What if something goes wrong?

If you wish to make a complaint about the research process for any reason then, in the first instance, you can contact the Research Supervisor at the following email address: [REDACTED]. If you subsequently feel that your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction, then you can contact the Chair of the UCL Research Ethics Committee – ethics@ucl.ac.uk.

10. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information that I collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any ensuing reports or publications.

11. Limits to confidentiality

Please note that confidentiality will be maintained as far as it is possible, unless during our conversation I hear anything which makes me worried that someone might be in danger of harm; I might have to inform relevant agencies of this.

12. What will happen to the results of the research project?

The results of the research project will inform the writing up of my EdD thesis. You will not be identified in the thesis and neither will the organisation you work for. The UCL Institute of Education Library will store a reference copy. I will also send you a summarised copy of the report.

It may be that some of the results of the research will inform research presentations or other research publications. Again, you will not be identified and neither will your organisation, if the results are used in these forums.

13. Data Protection Privacy Notice

Notice:

The data controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Office provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk. UCL's Data Protection Officer is Lee Shailer and he can also be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk.

Your personal data will be processed for the purposes outlined in this notice. The legal basis that would be used to process your personal data will be the provision of your consent. You can provide your consent for the use of your personal data in this project by completing the consent form that has been provided to you.

Your personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project. If we are able to anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide we will undertake this, and will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible.

If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, please contact UCL in the first instance at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk. If you remain unsatisfied, you may wish to contact the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). Contact details, and details of data subject rights, are available on the ICO website at: <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/data-protection-reform/overview-of-the-gdpr/individuals-rights/>.

14. Who is organising and funding the research?

The research forms part of my Doctor in Education studies at the Institute of Education at University College London. The research project is not funded by any external agent.

16. Contact for further information

If you have any questions about the research project and your participation then please feel free to contact me, either through my College contact details or via the following email address:

████████████████████.

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering taking part in this research project.

Appendix 9: Informed consent form

Institute of Education



Title of research:

The Current Workplace Experience of Further Education Lecturers and Managers: Still Restrictive After All These Years? (EdD Thesis)

Consent Form

If you are happy to participate in this study, please complete this consent form and return to David McClymont in person or via email to the address below.

	Yes	No
I have read and understood the information leaflet about the research.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that if any of my words are used in reports or presentations they will not be attributed to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that I can withdraw from the project at any time, and that if I choose to do this, any data I have contributed will not be used.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that I can contact David McClymont at any time and request for my data to be removed from the research project database.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that the results may be shared in research publications and/or presentations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that other genuine researchers may use my words in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name: _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Email contact address: [REDACTED]

Appendix 10: IfL's model of dual professionalism

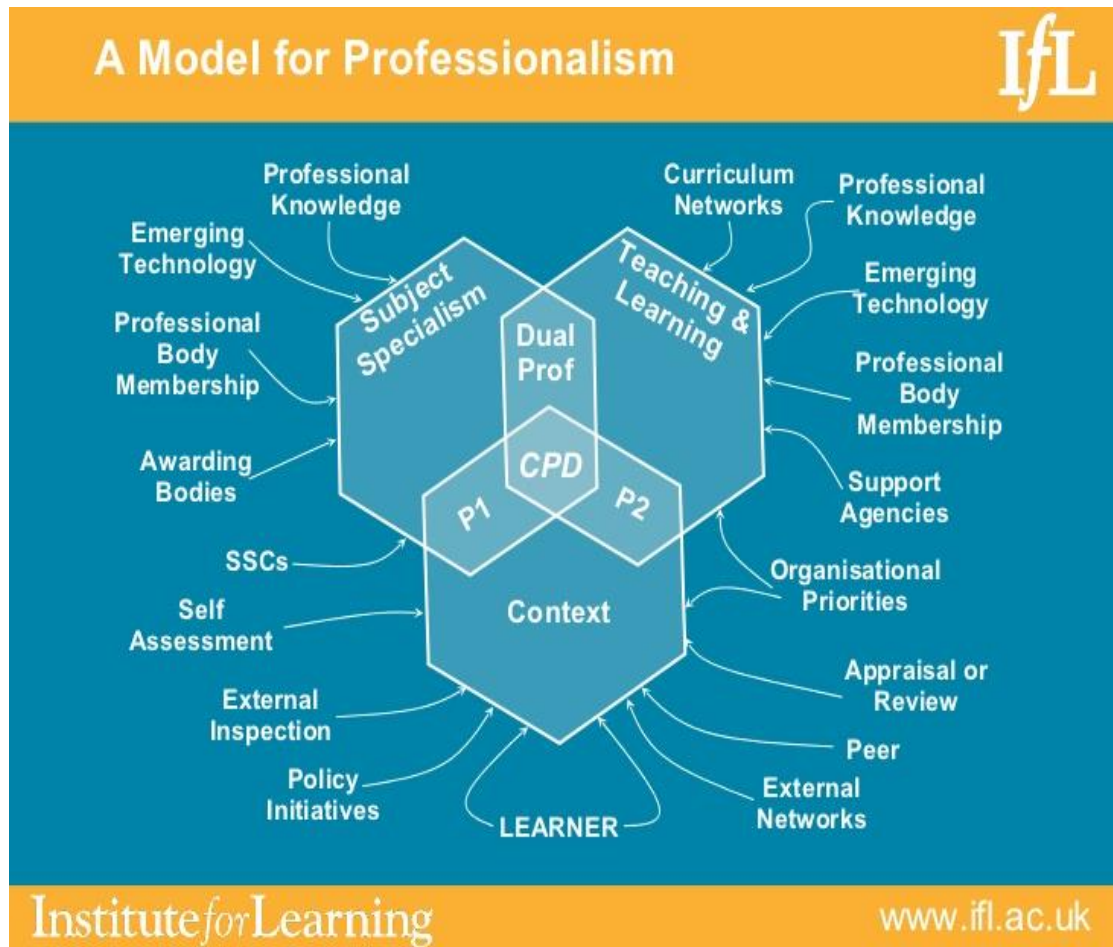


Figure 6: Model of dual professionalism (Institute for Learning)