

Apprentice to Graduate: A narrative study into the progression experience of Advanced Apprentices

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Abstract

This thesis explores the biographical journey into and through HE of a small group of former Advanced Apprentices. It explores how early educational experiences relate to pathways into and through the Apprenticeship system and how former Apprentices experience higher education (HE) and how it impacts on their lives, experiences and identities. The changing landscape of both Apprenticeship and HE means we need to capture these accounts of becoming a HE student to understand the lived experience of individuals in increasingly credentialised learning and work settings. This study utilises a narrative, longitudinal approach to explore the experience of former Apprentices within HE, drawing upon data from several semi-structured narrative interviews with sixteen former Apprentices as they progress through their HE programme. The final phase of the study engaged with the broader social network of six participants, illuminating how education and career decision-making and experiences are deeply embedded within family, friendship and peer networks. These rich narrative accounts help unearth the complexities of decisions and experiences of a group of under-researched individuals and calls into question dominant narratives about Apprentices and vocational learners.

Analysing learning experiences, educational transitions and identity highlight the process of becoming a HE student is relational, situational, and part of a web of complex interactions. The study's multidisciplinary framework has drawn on communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), possible selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986) and modes of reflexivity (Archer, 2003, 2007, 2012) to guide our understanding of former Apprentices' learning experiences and how reflexivity help them navigate constellations of education and career possibilities. The longitudinal network methodology produces a rich, intricate picture exploring the complexity of an individual's modes of reflexivity, how they may demonstrate different reflexive approaches in different contexts (Dyke, Johnson and Fuller, 2012), and how reflexivity may mature or respond to changing network dynamics.

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Glossary/Abbreviations

A Level – General Certificate of Education Advanced Level

BA (Hons) Bachelor of Arts (with Honours) degree award

BSc (Hons) Bachelor of Science (with Honours) degree award

BTEC – Business and Technology Education Council offering predominantly vocational qualifications

DfE – Department for Education

DfES – Department for Education and Skills

EPA – End-point assessment

ESRC – Economic and Social Research Council

FE – Further Education (post-compulsory education)

GCSE – General Certificate of Secondary Education

HE – Higher Education (university level)

HEFCE – Higher Education Funding Council for England

HNC/D – Higher National Certificate/Diploma

IAG – Information, Advice and Guidance

IfA – Institute for Apprenticeships

IB – International Baccalaureate

NAS – National Apprenticeship Service

NS-SEC – National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification

NVivo - qualitative and mixed methods research support software

NVQ – National Vocational Qualification

ONS – Office for National Statistics

POLAR – Participation of Local Area

UCAS – Universities and Colleges Admissions Service

VET – Vocational education and training

YTS – Youth Training Scheme

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction and background to the research

This thesis explores the biographical journey into and through HE of a small group of former Advanced Apprentices. It examines how early educational experiences relate to pathways into and through the Apprenticeship system and how former Apprentices experience Higher Education (HE) to develop an understanding of how HE impacts on their lives, experiences, and identities. Participation in Apprenticeships in England, has grown significantly over the past decade, rising from 419,000 in 2007/08 to 908,700 in 2016/17 (Skills Funding Agency, 2017) yet the numbers progressing to HE is small and their voices unheard. We currently know little about former Apprentices within the HE system – their decision to pursue HE, the role and influence of their social networks, their social and academic experiences of HE and the impact on their learner, occupational and student identity and sense of self. The changing landscape of both Apprenticeships and HE means we need to capture these accounts of student experience better, depicting the lived, biographical experience of individuals in increasingly credentialised learning and work settings.

This study utilises a narrative, longitudinal approach to explore the experiences of Apprentices who have embarked on HE, drawing upon data from several semi-structured narrative interviews with sixteen participants as they progressed from the early stages of HE until graduation. The final phase of the study engaged with six participants' wider social networks, all who had been nominated by the Apprentice participant. The interviews with the former Apprentices' networks illuminates how education and career decision-making and experiences are deeply embedded within family, friendship and peer networks. Drawing on wider network voices enables the reader to understand the former Apprentices' biographical and learning experiences, and contextualise them within their broader context.

Analysing learning experiences, transitions, and identity highlights that the process of becoming a HE student is relational, situational, and part of a web of complex interactions. The study has drawn on Archer's (2003, 2007, 2012) modes of reflexivity as a useful framework to understand how different approaches to reflexivity guide how people navigate constellations of education and career possibilities revealing the ways in which learning can contribute to establishing a way of life and the complexities involved. Archer's

modes of reflexivity proved difficult to apply as a type or fixed mode reflexivity, making more sense as an approach to reflexivity people adopted, in different contexts and changing circumstances to help them navigate their way through educational and career pathways. Insights from the social networks suggest that individuals adapt their approach to reflexivity according to the social situation, aspects of and stages in their lives.

1.2 Personal context

This section concentrates on my professional experience and personal beliefs leading me to this study. I discuss the research and broader professional work undertaken before my doctorate through which I developed my thinking about the issues addressed in this work; in so doing I highlight my personal journey to this PhD. I began working as a social researcher shortly after my first degree but felt restricted working for a private research company. I left my position, relocated and gained a role managing a strand of Aimhigher¹. This was a transformative experience, firstly because of the young people and colleagues I had the fortune to work with and the insights I gained on the importance of widening participation, and secondly, because the experience offered insight into my own educational experiences. I was amongst the first in my family to enter HE and did not feel like I 'belonged' during my undergraduate experience. I felt trapped by my decision to pursue a business degree but lacked the financial resources to restart a different course, so my whole experience was underlined by a sense of having to complete my course and use the degree to enter a career I wanted. I also felt different from my peers; I came from a working-class background and a working-class community. Despite being proud of this, I was acutely aware of significant difference with peers at my Russell Group institution. That said, this experience has framed my professional career spanning both research and project management in compulsory and post-compulsory education. I remained committed to widening participation and the central notion of ensuring that individuals from non-traditional backgrounds are supported to engage and achieve.

I started a Masters in Educational Research supported by my employer while working on a

¹ Aimhigher was a national widening participation programme run between 2004 and 2011 and was a collaboration between the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the then Department for Education and Skills (DfES). Aimhigher partnership activities were designed to widen participation in HE by raising awareness, aspirations and attainment among learners from under-represented groups. The programme was delivered through a partnership model where funding and activities were managed amongst schools, FE colleges and HE institutions by central coordinating bodies known as Aimhigher partnerships.

project focusing on embedding work-related learning in the 14-19 curriculum and helping to deliver the 14-19 reform programme. This work enlightened me to the role of vocational learning and experiences in engaging learners deemed at risk of disengagement. I completed the Masters after a move to the University of Bath and a role supporting the development of HE progression pathways for learners from vocational backgrounds including Apprenticeships, BTEC and Access provision. Towards the end of the Masters, I applied to continue with my studies to doctoral level. My Masters dissertation study of Apprentices transitions to HE was highly relevant to my work role and allowed me to build on my contacts with FE and work-based learning providers. Through this work and my studies, I had gained a thorough understanding of the work-based learning sector as well as wider HE policy. My Masters dissertation study was a precursor to this Doctoral study and gave me a firm grasp of some of the challenges of engaging with a group of learners hidden within the HE system. These work experiences led me to reflect on what makes young people disengage or reject academic learning and why there is a lack of fit between some young people and their education. These concerns were relevant to my work in HE, but I felt constrained by perceptions that it is the individuals who are lacking or deficit in some way for failing to engage in academic experiences. Therefore, in this study I wanted a central focus to be on challenging assumptions of deficit through interpreting how individuals experience the lived reality of Apprenticeships, the role of these experiences in encouraging the pursuit of HE and in 'becoming' a HE student.

1.3 Transformation of the research questions

This thesis began with the aim of providing a deeper understanding of former Apprentices' journeys into and through HE - moving away from defining vocational students in respect of their education pathways and potentially perceived deficits - instead viewing them in relation to their lives and distinctive biographies. Originally the aim was to explore the experiences of Apprentices who have progressed to HE focusing on the personal experience of those who have made the transition into, and through, HE and explore how they feel their prior knowledge and skills are recognised within pedagogy and practice. The original research aims were:

- To critically explore UK and international literature surrounding apprenticeships and work-based progression to HE.
- To use narrative case study analyses to understand apprentices' compulsory and post-

compulsory educational experiences and explore how these experiences connect with aspirations and learner identity.

- To explore the educational and social experiences of apprentices who successfully progress to HE.
- To examine the longitudinal (over a 20-month time span) impact of HE progression on self, identity and wider relationships.
- To consider how apprentices feel their skills and knowledge are recognised and valued in HE pedagogy and practice.

Over the course of the study, due in part to my own thinking and engagement, and in part to the direction the interviews with the former Apprentices took, the research became repositioned away from the progression of Apprentices to HE which suggest linear, institutionally sequenced pathways into and through HE which failed to reflect the complexity of HE participation for former Apprentices. The detailed narrative interviews, the insight into personal and social network accounts and the subsequent restorying guided a focus towards the Apprentices' highly individual and nuanced learning careers and biographies. Fundamental to understanding Apprentices in HE is the concept of becoming, the influence of networks and learning communities which help to depict changes in the construction of identity resulting from HE participation. The questions outlined below are a more accurate description of the refinement of the research as it developed, having been reworked to better capture the role and influence of social networks in HE decision-making, the influence of different identities, the role of modes of reflexivity on learning, and the impact of previous experiences and knowledge on the (re)construction of Apprentices' identity as HE learners.

- How does the English institutional and policy context frame Apprentice progression to Higher Education?
- What educational and broader network features have contributed to former Apprentices navigating a pathway to Higher Education?
- How have these experiences and the former Apprentices' 'networks of influence' influenced their aspirations and identity?
- How do former Apprentices experience the academic and social practice of Higher Education?
- What impact has this experience had upon their (re)construction of identity as learners within Higher Education?

1.4 Overview of the thesis structure

The following provides a brief summary of the structure of this thesis; this first chapter is followed by seven others.

In Chapter 2 I discuss the contemporary context for Apprenticeships in England which, when I commenced this study, was dominated by government policy to increase both employer and learner participation in Apprenticeship programmes. I explore the structure of Apprenticeship the participants experienced and make comparisons to more recent policy developments in the field. I explore the most recent and robust data on Apprenticeship progression to HE.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of relevant literature associated with educational decision-making, learning and identity. The first part of the chapter reviews literature surrounding educational decision-making paying attention to the relationship between structure and agency, before moving on to exploring the role of communities of practice in learning and concluding with a review of changing influences and aspects of identity. The second part of this chapter explores Margaret Archer's (2003, 2007, 2012) work on modes of reflexivity. In ordering the review in this manner, I have sought to present a balance of context and a coherent argument and discussion of a broad field of study.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodological and epistemological approach that underpins this study. The chapter commences by providing an introduction to my philosophical position before outlining the methodology adopted. It then goes on to describe the fieldwork process; detailing the longitudinal narrative interviews with former Apprentices and the interviews with their 'networks of influence', the data collection methods and the data analysis process adopted. The chapter concludes with a reflexive consideration of some of the ethical issues encountered during the fieldwork.

Chapter 5 is the first of the data analysis chapters, focussing on five detailed former Apprentice case studies drawing in network voices to contextualise biographical and learning experiences. This chapter aims to present these as coherent narratives which focus on the participants' decision making, their lived experiences and the role and influence of the networks within their lives with the voices of their wider networks being interwoven into the reconstructions while giving primacy to the voice of the Apprentice. I have aimed to present these as vivid reconstructions, wherever possible using the participants' own

words. Each case study is complemented by a short theoretically focused synopsis to guide the reader.

Chapter 6 revisits the theoretical base drawing upon the social network accounts as well as the individual biographical narratives to explore the journey to being an Apprentice. In presenting the data in this way, I want to remind the reader that these thematic experiences relate to one's life as a whole. The journey to HE reflects former Apprentices' interest in their vocation with evidence of meaningful engagement with their work. The experience of Apprenticeship highlights the contribution of the workplace communities of practice and their role in encouraging greater participation not only the learning process but in creating a future vision. The contemplation of future selves both within their organisation and more broadly leads to future planning, confirming a growing appreciation and commitment to continued learning and development.

Chapter 7 is the second thematic analysis chapter and focuses on the process of becoming a student, connecting the participants' narratives of making sense of their new academic community and their identity within it. The process of 'becoming' as the disposition to learn developed (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 1999, 2002) which was coupled with growing confidence and greater involvement in the learning experience. The data suggest that most participants struggle to engage with the student identity; finding a greater synergy with an identity which reflects their occupational values and how they want to be perceived by others. The former Apprentices prioritise reaching (and/or remaining) at the core of their workplace community and course community while remaining on the periphery of the wider HE community.

Chapter 8 draws this thesis to a close by first reflecting on the analysis and limitations. This is followed by an in-depth discussion of utilising the lens of Archers (2003, 2007, 2012) modes of reflexivity to understand progression to HE through powers of agency and structure. I then return and respond to the research questions. Through doing so, I weave together the three analysis chapters considering the overarching arguments. This chapter then goes on to discuss the recommendations for policy and practice and consider potential avenues for future research.

Chapter 2. Exploration and evaluation of Apprenticeships and progression to HE

In this chapter, I discuss the contemporary context of Apprenticeship in England and the broader context for progression to HE. The chapter is organised around the first research question which aims to understand the impact of the policy context on the nature of Apprentice progression to HE. The material in this chapter commences with a broad discussion around vocational policy and the resurgence of Apprenticeships through the Modern Apprenticeship (MA) programme. This is followed by a discussion of the more recent developments in England's model of Apprenticeship and trends in participation. The final section of this chapter anchors this study in recent research that provides a statistical overview of progression to HE from an Apprenticeship (Smith and Joslin, 2011, 2013; Joslin and Smith, 2014; Smith, Joslin and Jameson, 2015). The focus on the developments and trends in England's Apprenticeships is intended to set the scene for this research study by discussing some of the complex changes within the system and the impact these have had, and may continue to have, upon Apprentice progression to HE.

2.1 Synergy with broader education and vocational policy

Post-compulsory education is a vast sector with sharp divisions between academic and vocational learning. The discord and the differential impact this divide has on learners is compounded by the level of esteem that each type of education affords. Academic study is often perceived as the highest quality, 'gold standard' pathway for the most successful students (Foster, 2005) while vocational learning is viewed as suited to those less academically able, who may need a second chance due to previous educational failures or who come from less affluent, most typically, working-class backgrounds (Thompson, 2009). The term 'vocational' is value-laden (Holt, 1987; Pring, 1995) and while it represents work-relatedness, practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge there is a stigma of lower status. The negative perception of VET suggests young people are reluctant to pursue such courses or careers (Finegold *et al.*, 1990; Bell, 2005; Swift and Fisher, 2012) instead viewing academic pathways as better insurance against labour market risk with higher employment rates and wages particularly for HE graduates (Office for National Statistics [ONS], 2013). Atkins further criticises work that explores the vocational/academic divide as crude in its ignorance of the "multiple layers of hierarchy [that] exist related to credential type and subject" (2010, p.255). She argues that VET subjects and credentials have differing

levels of societal esteem, which impact on the young people who achieve them, yet these hierarchies are largely unrecognised.

Despite the increasing personal cost of HE, there has been a significant expansion in participation which, it has been argued, has contributed to an “erosion of vocational training from the top” (Busemeyer and Trampusch, 2011, p.30). Busemeyer and Trampusch (2011) contend that while traditionally the “median person in distribution of skills” (ibid., p.30) would have followed a vocational pathway they are now choosing to participate in HE. A broader consequence being that the pool of well-qualified school leavers interested in pursuing a vocational pathway has diminished as more young people opt for HE. If VET is to be seen as aspirational, there must be accessible and robust learning and career progression opportunities, including pathways into and through HE.

VET across the United Kingdom (UK) has been traditionally work-based and limited by the absence of any extensive general educational input or theoretical content that is present in the dual system² operated in several European countries. Despite cross-party support and multiple government initiatives³ that have intended to raise standards, promote competitiveness and enhance economic strength, VET in England is still widely perceived as being of poor quality with low labour market value (Keep, 2005; Wolf, 2011; Swift and Fisher, 2012). Such perceptions may also be centred upon the prevailing belief that educational credentials, in the form of high-status academic qualifications, are necessary for success in contemporary society. Twenty years ago, Ron Dearing’s Review of Qualifications for 16-19 Year Olds (1996)⁴ found that attitudes about the inherent worth of the different qualification types are pervasive, suggesting that the separation between institution and qualifications in the post-compulsory education sector continues to be viewed along the dividing lines of ability. In recent work, Tomlinson (2013) argues that despite significant changes to the VET landscape, there remains a hierarchy and division between vocational and academic pathways that perpetuates inequality. Schuller and Watson (2009, p.146) explain:

² The dual system of apprenticeship operated by several European countries including Germany, Austria, France and the Netherlands combines work-based learning with classroom-based experiences (including theoretical and general content such as languages and economics).

³ For example, Post-16 Skills Plan (DfE, 2016b) and Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills (DBIS, 2013b)

⁴ This review was separate from Dearing’s subsequent highly influential report, Higher Education in a Learning Society (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, 1997).

The hyper-complexity of the UK’s pattern of qualifications has led to all sorts of anxieties about equivalence, notably between so-called ‘academic’ and ‘vocational’ awards. The desire for transparency has resulted in frameworks that map vocational and academic qualifications.

The existence of multiple qualification awarding bodies across the UK, the plethora of available qualifications, a predominantly academic secondary school curriculum and the absence of a general education component within vocational programmes underpin the unsuccessful attempts to bring together academic and VET. Throughout this study, I refer to academic and VET to recognise the different forms of compulsory and post-compulsory qualifications that can lead to progression to higher levels. Table 1 below provides a summary of some of the academic, vocational and work-based qualifications available in England, Wales and Northern Ireland⁵. In general, VET encompasses both vocationally-related qualifications and work-based qualifications with Apprenticeships being defined as work-based learning⁶ and a framework consisting of several elements and qualification (see Section 2.1.1). While the table below highlights that qualification levels across the vocational-academic spectrum can be compared there are issues with size, content and learning hours meaning that learner transitions between types can often be challenging (see Section 2.2.1 for a fuller discussion about the implications at HE level).

Table 1: Example qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

QCF ⁷ Level	Academic	Vocationally related	Work-based learning
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⁵ In Scotland, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) regulates and awards all qualifications except of degrees in Scotland under the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). The Scottish framework consists of 12 levels, with 1 to 6 being pre-HE and 7 to 12 consisting of HE level.

⁶ Boud and Symes (2000) make the distinction between work-based learning and learning in the workplace. The former is given academic recognition, when suitably organised and managed whereas the latter is day-to-day learning as employees acquire new skills or approaches and does not gain formal recognition normally.

⁷ The QCF is the Qualifications and Credit Framework, it recognises qualifications and units by awarding credits giving learners the ability to accrue qualifications and progress up the levels. The QCF is jointly regulated by the England’s regulator Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual), Wales’ Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) and Northern Ireland’s Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment (CCEA). The QCF maps against the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) linking qualifications across Europe to make it easier to cross-reference qualifications between countries and to support education and labour market mobility. Comparisons to other qualifications are made in terms of standards rather than the breadth of study; qualifications at the same level can vary in terms of content, assessment methods, volume and purpose.

Level 8	Doctorate	Level 8 Award, Certificate and Diploma	NVQ Level 8
Level 7	Master's degree Postgraduate certificate/diploma	Level 7 Award, Certificate and Diploma	Degree Apprenticeship NVQ Level 7
Level 6	Batchelor degree Graduate certificate/diploma	Level 6 Award, Certificate and Diploma	Degree Apprenticeship NVQ Level 6
Level 5	Diploma of Higher Education	Level 5 Award, Certificate and Diploma Higher National Diploma (HND) Foundation degree	Higher Apprenticeship NVQ Level 5
Level 4	Certificate of Higher Education	Level 4 Award, Certificate and Diploma Higher National Certificate (HNC) Foundation degree	Higher Apprenticeship NVQ Level 4
Level 3	A & AS Levels Access to HE Diploma International Baccalaureate	Level 3 Award, Certificate and Diploma BTEC National Cambridge Technical	Advanced Apprenticeship NVQ level 3 Tech level qualifications
Level 2	Diploma for Progression GCSE grades A*- C (grades 9 - 4) ⁸	Level 2 Award, Certificate and Diploma Cambridge National and Technical	Intermediate Apprenticeship NVQ level 2
Level 1	GCSE grades D - G (grades 3 – 1)	Level 1 Award, Certificate and Diploma Cambridge National and Technical	Traineeship NVQ level 1

Source: Department for Education [DfE] (2015), Government Digital Service [GDS] (2017)

A fundamental obstacle for policy makers and education providers is how to overcome prevalent attitudes regarding VET which is too often regarded as a means to increase the motivation of learners who are of average or below average ability (Richardson, 2009).

⁸ Starting in 2017 initially with English and mathematics, new GCSEs in England will be graded from 9 to 1, with 9 being the highest grade (Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation [Ofqual], 2017). GCSEs in Wales and Northern Ireland will continue to be graded under the existing system.

Young people who have experienced disaffection or dissatisfaction within the educational system may find appeal in the inclusive, practical, and relevant experiences offered by vocational learning. Yet, VET can also address the interests of young people who are academically able but may prefer learning which offers practical experience and the acquisitions of qualifications together with the opportunity of progression to HE (Avis, 2004). This is not to say that these young people, including those who might be characterised as 'marginalised', do not have high aspirations for their future career (Bathmaker, 2001; Atkins, 2009) but may seek learning opportunities that can offer a more significant connection with career interests and the acquisition of technical skills and knowledge.

Bathmaker (2005) suggests that the rhetoric around the importance of academic qualifications is signalled through a move towards becoming a 'knowledge society' whereby individuals are increasingly aware of the need for academic qualifications in order to participate in a high skill, knowledge-based economy and to access professional careers. The recent HE White Paper (2016) aims to strengthen England's knowledge intensiveness by overhauling the university sector. It is intended to transform universities by creating more of them, in the hope that this will increase the number of people with HE qualifications thereby creating a more competitive economy. This emphasis on academic qualifications predictably affects the esteem afforded to non-academic pathways. Wolf's (2011) Review of Vocational Education suggested that whilst there are many examples of successful VET in England, too many young people are studying programmes which "fail to promote progression into either stable, paid employment or higher level education and training in a consistent or an effective way" (ibid., p.21). However, critics of the Wolf report argue it fails to provide a "clear consensus of what counts as good quality vocational education" (Fuller and Unwin, 2011, p.196) without which young people, parents/carers, and their advisors continue to struggle to understand the array of vocational options which underpin their ability to make appropriate educational and career choices. There are numerous options available to young people in the field of post-compulsory education, but there is insufficient clarity about their purpose, content, and value (Wolf, 2011). These difficulties are further compounded by the quality and availability of information, advice, and guidance (IAG) available to young people as they come to the end of their compulsory education. Consistent, timely and high-quality IAG provision for young people and their parents/carers is absolutely crucial to help individuals understand the nature of VET and

local opportunities. While schools have a statutory responsibility to provide independent IAG (DfE, 2017), it has long been criticised as being inadequate and patchy. Too many young people stumble through a vocational system that fails to provide a robust platform for progression to the next level of education or enable access to labour market opportunities. Many vocational-related initiatives over the years have suffered from failings that have exacerbated the esteem crisis they were created to solve (for example, Young, 1998; Unwin *et al.*, 2004; Pring *et al.*, 2009). Pring *et al.* (2009) comment on the difficulty VET faces in establishing itself as high-status, robust pathway while also welcoming those individuals fleeing from academic qualifications.

An important distinction this thesis utilises is drawn from Ryan, Gospel and Lewis (2006) and recognises the difference between 'Apprenticeship' (upper case) as the government funded, work-based learning programmes and 'apprenticeship' (lower case), which is "training that aims at an intermediate (Levels 3-5)⁹ skill and combines work-based learning, off-the-job training and technical education" (*ibid.*, p.362). An Apprenticeship Framework comprises several accredited and unaccredited components (see Section 2.1.1 for greater detail) with the qualifications relating to the sector of study predominantly being vocationally-related qualifications. Government-supported Apprenticeships include Intermediate Apprenticeships, Advanced Apprenticeships, Higher Apprenticeships, and Degree Apprenticeships (Table 2).

Table 2 Apprenticeship levels

Name	Level	Equivalent educational level
Intermediate	2	5 GCSE passes at grades A* to C
Advanced	3	Two A Levels
Higher	4, 5, 6 and 7	Foundation degree and above
Degree	6 and 7	Bachelor or Master's degree

Source: National Apprenticeship Service [NAS], (2015a)

One major criticism levied at some Apprenticeships is that training is predominantly offered at Level 2 with little or no worthwhile off-the-job component (Ryan *et al.*, 2006; Ryan,

⁹ See Table 1 for clarification over qualification levels.

Gospel and Lewis, 2007; Lewis, Ryan and Gospel, 2008). While there are marked differences in the organisation, funding and management of Apprenticeships across the UK^{10 11}, they essentially comprise a contract between an employer and an individual that combines a structured programme of on-the-job training and part-time work, together with assessed technical education (Steedman, Gospel and Ryan, 1998; Lewis, 2014) aimed at equipping individuals with intermediate-level skills. Despite high-quality provision in some sectors and some employers, a significant concern is the historically low standards and frameworks being customised in a manner which negatively impacts an Apprentice's experience and learning outcomes. Winch, Clark and Brockmann (2010) draw attention to the need to reconcile the conflicting issues of ensuring quality while providing flexibility, which are central facets of recent and ongoing reforms, discussed further in Section 1.3.

The negative perception that Apprenticeships are not for higher achieving school-leavers reinforces the academic-vocational divide as well as broader social inequalities. This has a destructive effect, impacting on skills shortage and economic competitiveness and undermining ambitions of producing a skilled workforce (Young, 2008; Fuller and Unwin, 2011; Pring, Hayward and Hodgson, 2012). It also raises serious questions about social justice; Avis (2004) argues that the scant importance attached to knowledge in vocational provision affects young people's ability to transcend contexts and therefore contributes to existing patterns of class differentiation. Allen and Ainley (2007, 2010; Ainley, 2003, 2013) argue education functions as a means of social control with vocational and academic pathways contributing to increasing social divisions. Furthermore, Atkins (2009, 2010, 2017; Atkins and Flint, 2015) suggests that young people are differentiated in the education system by social class and ability. In the past two decades several researchers (Bates and Riseborough, 1993b; Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson, 1996; Colley *et al.*, 2003; Bathmaker, 2005) have made clear the association between social class and VET; a significant factor in the replication of classed inequalities. Atkins, Flint and Oilfield (2011) recognise the influence of social class on the perceptions of VET arguing this leads young people down paths traced by their families and broader communities while recognising that

¹⁰ Apprenticeship system operates differently across the UK's devolved administrations. While many of the fundamental principles surrounding an Apprenticeship are common to all four systems there are differences with regard to funding, qualifications, employer involvement and development. Under the new Apprenticeship changes (see Section 2.2) the differences between the devolved administrations are becoming more marked with England implementing many changes which are either not being adopted or only partially adopted by the UK regions.

¹¹ In Scotland Apprenticeships continued to be termed Modern Apprenticeships.

social class influences are subject to subtle differences (Colley, 2006). Furthermore, they suggest that publicising of VET 'opportunities' are heavily classed which contributes to the enduring reproduction of inequality. Whatever liberal ambitions are held for VET these are inhibited by its relationship to other forms of education and broader socioeconomic influences.

Despite these problems, the benefits of vocational learning are indisputable: if we learn by doing as well as by thinking, reading, and writing, we develop skills and competencies as well as underpinning knowledge (Lucas, Claxton and Webster, 2010). A fundamental shift needs to take place for VET to be seen as evidence of intellectual capacity on a par with academic learning and part of this revolution concerns the way 'intelligence' is characterised and perceived. Unwin (2004) makes a call to move beyond the 'deficit approach' whereby VET is deemed only for those individuals who have not achieved at an academic level.

Fuller (2014, p.5) argues that “the political and industrial will, institutional arrangements, capacity, partnerships and shared collective vision and mission to use apprenticeship and vocational education to generate a skilled generation does not exist as yet”. I will reflect later in this chapter on how some of the structural and policy changes to the Apprenticeship programme may impact on young peoples' experience of, and progression through Apprenticeships. Given the gravity of youth unemployment¹², declining social mobility (Goldthorpe, 2013; Milburn, 2014) and its impact on life chances, there is a need for an ongoing debate about Apprenticeship, progression routes and occupational destinations available for all young people. There are significant social and economic motives which provide an imperative to ensure that recognised Apprenticeships are framed within a broader system of transition in which young people and adults can achieve permeability and equivalence irrespective of the pathway chosen.

2.1.1 The dawn of the Modern Apprenticeship

The launch of the Modern Apprenticeship (MAs) in 1994 was born out of concerns about the UK's deficiencies in supplying intermediate skills in comparison to economic

¹² 621,000 young people aged 16-24 in the UK were unemployed in May-July 2016 down by 96,000 compared to the previous year. The unemployment rate (13.6% May to June 2016) for young people (aged 16 to 24) is consistently higher than for older age groups and reached a peak of 22.5% in late 2011 (Office for National Statistics, 2016).

competitors (Harris, 2003). The MA programme was centred on building partnerships between young people, employers, training organisations and Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs),¹³ the goal was for MAs to be aspirational and to provide a platform for educational and career progression. To create a distinction with previous government-sponsored schemes, they were set up at a minimum of Level 3 with Apprentices having employed status. In the hope of challenging gender stereotyping they were offered in a more extensive range of sectors than traditional Apprenticeships. Around the same time, National Traineeships (note at this point they were not called Apprenticeships) were introduced at Level 2 to offer “a progression route into Apprenticeships for those young people who were not ready to enter a Level three programme” (Unwin and Wellington, 2001, p.11). Detrimentially, National Traineeships were brought under the Apprenticeship umbrella becoming Foundation MAs with much of the subsequent expansion of Apprenticeships being mainly at Level 2. This Level 2 expansion has compromised the aim of providing intermediate skills and instead arguably serving as a tool for social inclusion (Fuller and Unwin, 2003; Fuller, 2004).

MAs comprised of three learning components: NVQ¹⁴, the practical workplace element; Technical Certificate, providing theoretical underpinning (made optional in response to employer criticism); and Key Skills,¹⁵ accrediting basic literacy, numeracy, and communication skills (subsequently becoming Functional Skills). However, the original philosophy of the MA programme was worn down. Level 2 Apprenticeships became the norm and combined with a lack of consistency in requirements for underpinning knowledge. Apprenticeships came to be characterised by low status, poor standards, and variable quality of provision (Gospel and Fuller, 1998; Fuller, 2004). Low completion rates and the absence of any general education component contributed to the perception among young people and their parents of Apprenticeship as a low-status pathway (Fuller, 2004; Canning, 2007). Commentators suggest these negative perceptions lead some young

¹³ TECs were local bodies established in England and Wales in the early 1990s to administer publicly funded training programmes, managing schemes including Youth Training and MAs and promoting training and business enterprise. They were abolished in 2001 under the Learning and Skills Act 2000 and their responsibilities fell under the newly established Learning and Skills Councils.

¹⁴ The report 'A New Training Initiative' called for Apprenticeship to be based on the achievement of a set of competencies derived from national occupational standards (Manpower Services Commission [MSC], 1981) and resulted in a new form of vocational qualification - competency-based National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). Introduced in 1986, they represent a long-lasting transformation to the VET landscape.

¹⁵ Key Skills are aimed at young people who have not achieved the equivalent of GCSE English and maths grades A-C.

people to remain in full-time education rather than seek out Apprenticeship opportunities (Roberts, 2004; Beck, Fuller and Unwin, 2006a). Nevertheless, there is a host of factors at play which combine to encourage students to stay in full-time education; including increasing participation in HE, lack of high-quality Apprenticeships, and crucially inadequate IAG about vocational pathways, particularly in schools (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2001).

However, despite these shortcomings, Apprenticeship has been a continued focus of government policy in England. In the early 2000s, national frameworks were developed to define minimum standards and were ratified by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning (ASCL) Act (2009) with the introduction of the Specifications of Apprenticeship Standards for England (SASE) (Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills [DIUS], 2015). These set out the minimum requirements for an Apprenticeship framework to be recognised and funded. The SASE requires all Apprentices to be employed and guaranteed a national Apprentice minimum wage. It specifies the qualifications required:

- Competency-based qualification¹⁶, most frequently a work-based qualification focusing on the skills required to do the job and usually achieved through on-the-job training.
- Knowledge-based qualification¹⁶, known previously as a 'technical certificate' contains the knowledge required for the job role and is a work-based or vocationally-related qualification involving off-the-job training.

Designed to address some of the criticisms regarding the general education component, such as those expressed by Steedman (2010) and Brockmann, Clarke, and Winch (2011), the SASE introduced elements of broader learning into an Apprenticeship framework including:

- Key and Functional Skills (numeracy, literacy, ICT) although these are mostly remedial in addressing low levels of literacy and numeracy rather than developing general education.
- Employee rights and responsibilities (ERR) which cover legislative aspects including employer and employee statutory rights and responsibilities under Employment Law as well as broader work and social elements.
- Personal learning and thinking skills (PLTS) to show achievement of the six PLTS including independent enquiry, creative thinking, reflective learning, team working,

¹⁶ Some Apprenticeship frameworks include a combined qualification covering both knowledge and skills.

self-management and effective participation.

The SASE also set out the minimum Guided Learning Hours for off and on the job learning, observers have argued that these components fail to fully recognise the general educational needs of 16-19-year-olds which were more closely met by the relative high demands of the technical certificate (Pring *et al.*, 2009; Brockmann *et al.*, 2011).

The lack of a robust framework for the provision of Apprenticeships in England is, in part, due to the absence of an established mechanism for the systematic involvement of all interested parties. In the absence of a robust statutory framework, quality has been variable, while there is excellent provision in some sectors, schemes that resemble little more than work experience in others do little justice to reputation (Ryan *et al.*, 2006). Ryan, Gospel and Lewis's (2006) research into the organisation of Apprenticeships in large employers revealed wide variability particularly in relation to the technical certificates and found that Apprenticeships were too often marred by a low employer commitment with many large employers contracting out programme responsibilities. Research also found dissatisfaction with the technical certificate and key skills elements being too often viewed as irrelevant, failing to meet employer needs and lacking integration with on-the-job training which has led to them being cited as a reason for non-completion (Unwin and Wellington, 2001; Ryan *et al.*, 2006). However, with employer commitment, for example, where they are utilised to secure the future of the organisation, they often extend beyond government requirements (Fuller and Unwin, 2007).

Concern over the gender and racial imbalance in Apprenticeship participation triggered a major investigation by the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) on the perceptions of Apprenticeships, educational and labour market opportunities (Fuller, Beck and Unwin, 2005; Beck *et al.*, 2006a; Beck, Fuller and Unwin, 2006b). The research involving young people, Apprentice employers and other stakeholders found that gendered and racial expectations within informal networks of family, friends, and schools guided young people's decision-making around educational participation and careers. Beck, Fuller and Unwin (2006a) emphasise inconsistent and unreliable IAG provision which infrequently challenged stereotypes instead reinforcing a 'play it safe' approach. The study acknowledged that pursuing an Apprenticeship traditionally held by the opposite sex was viewed as risky and compounded by the perceived risk of a vocational pathway (Beck *et al.*, 2006a). This work highlights that the "resistance to crossing the occupational gender divide

would not melt away” (Beck *et al.*, 2006a, p.287) even if the quality of IAG were improved. Despite the broadening of Apprenticeship opportunities, recent work suggests a continuing gender divide with women dominating service type Apprenticeships (for example, hairdressing, health and social care, and early years education), where pay, qualifications and career development prospects are limited while men dominate the highest paid (Fuller and Unwin, 2014).

There is also a growing interest in the relationship between Apprenticeship participation and socioeconomic status. While widening participation has been a longstanding concern in improving HE participation, underpinned by robust data, information on the socio-economic status and background of Apprentices is limited. In the absence of any sound evidence, it is hard to draw any firm conclusions regarding who the Apprenticeship programme best serves and its contribution to social mobility. Fuller (2004) has argued that the academic-vocational divide reflects wider social inequalities, with the lower socioeconomic classes over-represented in Apprenticeships. However, preliminary analysis of the Labour Force Survey suggests that Apprentices are marginally more likely to be drawn from middle- rather than low-income families:

Individuals from the third and fourth quintiles of parental earnings are over-represented amongst Apprentices (24% and 26% respectively), while individuals in the bottom two quintiles are underrepresented amongst Apprenticeships (18% each). A similar pattern emerges in terms of parental education. This suggests that Apprenticeships may do more to help those in the middle rather than the bottom of the income distribution.¹⁷

(Crawford *et al.*, 2011, p.21)

However, a recent study by Wyman (2015) suggests that the most well-respected Apprenticeships programmes are disproportionately populated by those from wealthier backgrounds and/or have attended schools with higher levels of progression to elite universities, with far fewer students who have received free school meals and are from low-income families accessing Apprenticeships. In the absence of any large-scale datasets, it is impossible to verify this data, but these two studies point to a two-tier system with

¹⁷ Each sample of children was divided into fifths, ranked according to a constructed measure of socioeconomic status which is based on their parents’ income, social class, housing tenure, and a self-reported measure of financial difficulties

those from wealthier and middle-class backgrounds having greater access to better quality, aspirational Apprenticeships.

2.2 Contemporary developments in Apprenticeships

The most current reform of Apprenticeships is born out of the Holt Review (2012) and Richard Review (2012). The Holt Review considered the position of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and made recommendations of how to engage them in Apprenticeships. Holt recommended raising awareness of the benefits of Apprenticeships; supporting a more effective relationship between SMEs and training providers; and, simplifying ownership and responsibility for the Apprenticeship programme to reduce barriers to engagement. Richard's recognised the widespread support for Apprenticeships but asserted that the definition of what an Apprenticeship is and should be had been stretched to the point that core features have been diluted; leading to a demise of the traditional relationship between employer and Apprentice. Instead, the system is government-led and shaped by training professionals rather than employers, and has lost focus in being a form of education for the Apprentice. The Review recommends redefining Apprenticeship at Level 3 or higher to ensure broader respect and credibility, and to ensure the programme supports educational and career progression.

The Future of Apprenticeships in England (DBIS, 2013a) was the Government's response to the Holt and Richard Reviews and was followed by the vision to deliver 3 million Apprenticeships by 2020¹⁸ (DBIS, 2015a). These reforms represent the most significant and wide-reaching reforms to the VET system in England in modern times. The new ideology and reformed policies could bring about a paradigm shift in cultural assumptions about VET and in the general population's perceptions of Apprenticeships which, as discussed previously, have too often been negative. Apprenticeships policy across the UK is evolving, and while education policy is a devolved matter, Apprenticeships are high on the agenda across the devolved administrations and there continue to be broad similarities between Apprenticeship models across the regions. Under the Apprenticeship reforms in England, Apprenticeship Standards will replace the SASE Frameworks (DBIS, 2015b). These new standards¹⁹ are being designed, developed, implemented and quality assured by employer-

¹⁸ There were 2.2 million apprenticeship starts between 2010 and 2015

¹⁹ The new standards, are written definitions of the learning requirements for Apprenticeship programmes focusing on how an Apprentice should demonstrate mastery of an occupation and meet professional registration requirements in sectors where this exists (for

led groups known as ‘trailblazers’, giving employers the responsibility to ensure Apprenticeships meet their needs, the needs of their sector and the economy more widely. Authentic employer partnerships to ensure that Apprenticeships are occupation rather than employer-specific, and targeted at developing competence and skills at Level 3 rather than Level 2, is central to this process and signifies an intention to create a talent pipeline. One controversial and potential adverse change is that under the new standards there is no requirement for an Apprenticeship to include accredited qualifications. Instead, there is an independent end-point assessment (EPA) which removes the chance for an Apprentice to accumulate qualifications through their learning programme²⁰. This marks a significant change to the current continuous assessment approach that underpins the competency-based National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). The exception is Level 6 and 7 Apprenticeships, which will need to be designed in conjunction with a HE provider. The newly formed Institute for Apprenticeships (IfA)²¹, which is independent of government, has responsibility for the new standards and funding.

The Apprenticeship Levy²² is also being introduced (DfE, 2016b) which will be paid for by large employers with a pay bill of more than £3 million²³. The funding will enter a ‘digital apprenticeship account’, topped up with a government contribution, enabling employers to purchase Apprenticeship training direct from a provider²⁴. Fundamentally, this changes the funding flows – from funding the training provider direct to employers. Smaller employers are not required to pay the levy but must contribute towards some of the costs of the off-the-job training for their Apprentices. While this has been criticised for increasing the

example, in engineering, science and accountancy). The approved standard is a concisely written document that outlines the skills, knowledge and behaviours required of the Apprentice and the job they need to be able to do by the time they have completed their apprenticeship.

²⁰ While England is pursuing Apprenticeship Standards; Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland’s Apprenticeship frameworks will continue to be based on National Occupational Standards (NOS) with a continues focus on qualifications.

²¹ The IfA is a new independent, employer-led body which has responsibility for regulating the quality of Apprenticeships. It has an independent chair who leads a board of employers, business leaders and their representatives, to ensure employers are able to drive apprenticeship quality.

²² This is a UK-wide policy with which employers across all nations must comply but there will be significant differences in both its implementation and criteria, for example, in Wales funding is being removed for level 2 Apprenticeships (for over 20 year olds) and non-priority sectors, such as Retail, Business Administration and Customer Service.

²³ The levy will be 0.5% of the portion of salary costs over £3 million (so an employer with a pay bill of £5 million would pay 0.5% of £2 million, or £10,000).

²⁴ Levy funds which are not spent within an 18 month period will expire and reinvested by the government in apprenticeships for smaller employers.

administrative burden, it offers employers more control over training provider choice.

While many of the changes to the system have been welcomed, one controversial element is the removal of the requirement for an Apprentice to complete nationally-recognised qualifications. Instead, each new Apprenticeship Standard must have an assessment plan including an EPA that is graded, unique to the Apprenticeship and includes a holistic assessment of the underpinning knowledge, skills and behaviour (DBIS, 2015b). It is aimed at assuring employers that Apprentices are job-ready and that they are consistently assessed, regardless of employer or training provider²⁵. It also shifts Apprenticeships away from being loosely modular towards full integration of the knowledge, skills and behavioural components required to undertake a specific occupation and operate confidently within a sector. However, as will be discussed further in Section 2.6, removing the mandatory requirement for nationally-recognised qualifications has significant implications for the portability and transferability of Apprenticeships, specifically for those Apprentices who may wish to progress to HE. More positively, in a recent small-scale study with FE Apprenticeship providers, Saraswat (2016) found that participants believed that academic standards and quality would be maintained through the inclusion of appropriate qualifications, although there are inherent dangers in removing mandatory requirements.

This move to give employers dominant responsibility is essentially how the Apprenticeship system operated from the masters and guilds period to the 1960s and 1970s, the latter of which was typified by large employers with clear progression pathways. Arguably, there are still some sectors of the economy that could operate like this, such as engineering, construction and pharmaceuticals as these industries are dominated by large employers with effective professional bodies which have historically invested in Apprenticeship style training. There are also several other industries that might respond positively to the new reforms. For example, under the previous system, there were relatively few financial sector Apprenticeships, yet the promise of a levy along with the trailblazer pilots appears to have galvanised action in a previously weak sector²⁶. One of the most positive elements of these

²⁵ Whilst qualifications per se are not required within an apprenticeship there are minimum English and maths requirements. These apply to all apprentices following standards unless already achieved:

- For level 2 Apprenticeships: level 1 English and maths and take the test for level 2 prior to taking their end-point assessment.
- For level 3 to 7 Apprenticeships: level 2 English and maths prior to taking their end-point assessment (DBIS, 2015b).

²⁶ In 2007/2008, 560 learners started an Apprenticeship in 'Providing Financial Advice', the majority (420) were at Level 2 by 2015/16, this had increased to 3,480 learners, with almost equal

developments is that several of the Apprenticeship Standards demonstrate clear prospects of progression to the next Apprenticeship level, yet whether this translates into progression will only be seen in time.

2.2.1 Recent trends in participation in Apprenticeships in England

Competition for places for some of the most well-known and respected Apprenticeship schemes is currently more competitive than some of the most respected universities in the UK, illustrating the high level of demand for high-quality Apprenticeships (Skills Taskforce, 2013). Despite some world-class Apprenticeships in some sectors of the economy, the availability of high-quality Apprenticeship in England is far from universal which must be remedied if Apprenticeships are to compete globally. Apprenticeships at Level 3 or above (see Table 2), which offer the opportunity for progression, can provide a realistic alternative to academia and the prospect of financial security, skills development, and career advancement.

There has been significant growth in Apprenticeships in the past decade, but this is barely reflected in the participation of young people aged 16-18²⁷. In England, in 2008 just 5.4% of young people aged 16-18 participated²⁸ in an Apprenticeship (DFE, 2010) and despite growth in popularity, the participation rate had only marginally increased to 6.9% by 2015 (DFE, 2015). Regarding numbers, this represents a small change from 190,600 16-18 year olds in 2007/08 to 194,100 in 2014/15 (Skills Funding Agency [SFA], 2015). However, these figures do not reflect the increase in overall Apprenticeship participation since 2007/08 (see Table 3) which has been primarily driven by an increase in participation by people aged 25 and over. In 2014/15, they made up 41.6% of all Apprenticeships and were the largest group of participants for the fourth year in a row. However, as adult Apprentices are often already employed when they start an Apprenticeship this practice conflicts with the principle of providing a route into work for young people (House of Commons, 2008; Fuller and Unwin, 2012b). This rapid change in Apprentice age profile was a direct response to the political pressure to quickly increase the number of Apprentices. Training providers who were contracted to deliver a certain number of Apprenticeships found a more accessible

proportions at Level 2 (1,780) and Level 3 (1,700). This represents a growth of over 500% compared to 122% overall growth in Apprenticeship starts (DfES, 2016a).

²⁷ This is against a backdrop of a declining 16-18 year population from 2010 (ONS, 2015).

²⁸ Participation is the number of people who were on an apprenticeship in a given year.

market in employed adults than recruiting new younger Apprentices (Wolf, 2015).

A second significant area of growth is in the field of Higher Apprenticeships as the most recent additions to the Apprenticeship dynasty. Introduced in 2008 they provide learning at Level 4, 5 and 6 and can provide a genuine alternative to traditional HE (NAS, 2012). Higher and Degree Apprenticeships are approximate to undergraduate degrees, with suggestions that they could pose a substantive threat to 'traditional' HE provision (Tudor and Helyer, 2016). However, care needs to be taken in assuming the equivalence between Higher Apprenticeships and traditional HE qualifications, since some of the qualifications included in Higher Apprenticeship frameworks contain significantly fewer credits²⁹ than undergraduate degrees (for a fuller discussion see Fuller and Unwin, 2012a). Understanding the scope of qualifications is complex, for example, while qualifications at the same level QCF or Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)³⁰ can be compared in terms of standards and level that may vary in terms of magnitudes of study and assessment. For example, a foundation degree normally includes the equivalent of a minimum of two years' full-time study with most of the final year made up of modules at Level 5 leading to an individual having studied 240 credits, with 90 credits at level 5 (QAA, 2009). However, one option for the Higher Apprenticeship for Assistant Practitioner (Health) includes only the Level 5 Diploma for Assistant Practitioners in Healthcare which is 120 credits not all of which are at Level 5 (NAS, 2015b). That is not to say that Higher Apprentices are not operating at the level to which they are qualified, more that there is currently no mechanism which recognises this.

The expansion of desirable Higher and Degree Apprenticeships not only creates a viable new career option for many young people and adults but also has the potential to make a profound and long-lasting impact on the perception of Apprenticeships. A vibrant Higher and Degree Apprenticeship programme can help to locate Apprenticeships as a valued career option and a respectable pathway into a professional career. For those already in the workplace, they present an upskilling pathway enabling advancement and helping to challenge the standard routes into the professions (Crawford-Lee, 2012).

²⁹ Credit is a means of quantifying and recognising learning and can be used as a tool to compare learning achieved in different contexts. Within the UK, one credit represents 10 notional hours of learning.

³⁰ Levels 4 to 8 of the QCF equate to the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)

Table 3 All Age Apprenticeship Participation by Level and Age (2002/03 to 2014/15)

	Age	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
		Full Year	Full Year	Full Year	Full Year	Full Year	Full Year	Full Year	Full Year
Intermediate Level Apprenticeship	Under 19	144,400	129,800	140,400	150,000	144,200	132,600	134,500	137,900
	19-24	102,200	101,300	114,600	141,300	159,100	167,200	176,800	176,400
	25+	15,900	42,500	49,000	123,900	203,000	201,900	192,300	203,100
	Total	262,500	273,600	304,000	415,200	506,200	501,700	503,500	517,400
Advanced Level Apprenticeship	Under 19	46,200	44,100	45,800	52,900	53,300	54,800	58,100	62,700
	19-24	94,200	90,300	94,900	108,100	118,900	132,500	137,300	142,000
	25+	16,100	36,500	44,800	86,100	144,800	189,700	156,500	144,500
	Total	156,400	170,900	185,500	247,200	317,000	377,000	351,900	349,100
Higher Apprenticeship	Under 19	-	100	200	300	500	800	1,000	1,400
	19-24	100	200	1,400	2,400	2,900	4,200	5,700	8,000
	25+	-	-	100	800	2,300	8,000	11,500	20,300
	Total	100	300	1,700	3,500	5,700	13,000	18,100	29,700
All Apprenticeships	Under 19	190,600	173,900	186,400	203,100	189,600	181,300	185,800	194,100
	19-24	196,400	191,800	210,900	251,900	272,100	294,500	308,900	315,000
	25+	32,000	79,100	93,900	210,900	344,800	392,900	356,900	362,600
	Total	418,900	444,800	491,300	665,900	806,500	868,700	851,500	871,800

Source: SFA (2015)

2.3 Apprenticeship progression to HE

Historically the completion of an Apprenticeship was considered the endpoint, with the individual having become an independent skilled practitioner. However, there is now a standard viewpoint that VET, and specifically Apprenticeships, should provide a platform for progression (Bowers-Brown and Berry, 2005; University Vocational Awards Council [UVAC], 2009; Fuller, Turbin and Wintrup, 2010; Thomas, Cox and Gallagher, 2012; Dismore, 2014a, 2014b) which invariably places HE at the top of the hierarchy. With the proliferation of different forms of HE, McCowan (2012, p.112) contends that “conceptual boundaries must be placed on the notion of higher education”. He argues that HE should build on substantial previous learning and involve in-depth and sustained study involving knowledge specialisation.

NAS (cited in University Vocational Awards Council [UVAC], 2009) have suggested that half of Advanced Apprentices show an interest in pursuing a HE equivalent course while a later study (Vivian *et al.*, 2012) places the figure at almost two thirds. The strategy document, Skills for Sustainable Growth, highlighted the need for “clear ladders of progression” (DBIS, 2010, p.18) and reinforced that “an Apprenticeship will also provide the foundation for further learning at higher levels including, but not exclusively, Level 4 Apprenticeships” (ibid., p.18). While the criticality of Apprenticeship to governments’ skills policies is evident (Leitch, 2006; DIUS, 2008), the extent to which the programme delivers educational and career progression have been recognised as a concern (University Vocational Awards Council [UVAC], 2009; Gittoes, 2009; Fuller and Unwin, 2012a). As discussed in Section 2.2, the Richard Review (2012) identified the potential to strengthen Apprentice educational and career progression, recommending a stronger emphasis on providing better career advancement support. This change of focus and drive for progression to higher-level skills present a significant shift in policy.

Over the past decade, attempts have been made to create a structural ladder from VET to HE, including Foundation degrees and Higher Apprenticeships programmes. Vocational HE programmes expanded rapidly in the early 2000s with the introduction of Foundation degrees contributing to the decline of HND/Cs as many were converted into Foundation degrees. However, from 2009-10 there was a rapid decline in Foundation degrees entrants as well as a continued erosion of HND/C provision as increasing numbers of HE institutions with FD and HND/C provision began to move students onto first degree courses as a “a rational response to the existence of student number controls” (HEFCE, 2014, p.9). However, this fails to recognise that the factors contributing to the decline of FDs are likely to be multiple and complicated; including the complexity of FE/HE partnerships, employer engagement, the financial crisis, and

broader challenges to HE funding. While participation in FDs has decreased since its peak in 2010, around 50,000 students per year continue to participate in these programmes (HESA, 2016). The driving force behind FDs was for partnerships of universities, colleges, and employers to design courses linked to intermediate-level skills. While each Foundation degree was different in content, delivery and assessment at the core were employer involvement and work-based learning (Beaney, 2006).

The development of Higher and Degree Apprenticeships may play a major role in providing flexible, part-time, and work-based HE opportunities and have the potential to provide an important route for non-traditional students³¹, such as those with an Apprenticeship background, who may wish to continue the pattern of combining working and studying. However, there is a paucity of information about students who wish to follow flexible and/or part-time patterns of HE with their experiences having received little attention (Callender and Wilkinson, 2013). Over the last twenty years, the UK has witnessed a massive expansion in undergraduate HE from around 1.3 million students in 1995/96 to 1.7 million in 2014/15 with a peak of 1.9 million undergraduate students in 2010/11 (HESA, 2000, 2016). This figure obscures a vast decline in participation in FDs (-44.8%), other undergraduate (-56.8%) and part-time participation³² (-38.6%) (HESA, 2000, 2016). Sadly, it is these disappearing HE programmes that are more likely to attract non-traditional students due to their acceptance of a broader range of qualifications and experiences.

2.3.1 Apprentices in HE

There has been limited academic research exploring the experiences of Apprentices who have progressed to HE with much of the work concerning mapping provision (Fuller and Unwin, 2012a), examining progression patterns (see Section 2.3.1.1 below) or have focused on intentions rather than experiences of progression (Bowers-Brown and Berry, 2005; Fuller *et al.*, 2010; Thomas *et al.*, 2012). However, no study has specifically investigated motivation and transition experiences, despite calls for research (Skills Commission, 2009). There is only one recent academic study with Apprentices who have progressed into HE, which is limited by its male-dominated engineering-based sample, and the interviews having taken place at differing

³¹ Non-traditional has been used to refer to students who may enter HE with vocational or work-based qualifications rather than the traditional academic entry qualifications, from families without any previous HE experience, who may be mature, have significant work experience, and/or be combining work, study and caring responsibilities. Other features may also define them as different from the traditional HE population, but these are the most prominent for this study.

³² Part-time includes all types of HE provision formally funded by HEFCE.

points during and after the completion of HE (Dismore, 2014a, 2014b, 2016). Despite the limitations, this work provides a fascinating insight into the challenges for Apprentices in negotiating transition; namely the credential landscape, the role of employers and HEs perception of vocational qualification (Dismore, 2014b). The later paper (Dismore, 2016) also hints at the role of networks in the lived experiences with the role of networks as pivotal enablements to HE success. This work is only able to offer a snapshot in time which may misjudge the importance of transformation and identity change experienced by individuals in their progression to academic HE learning.

2.3.2 Numbers of Apprentices progressing to HE

Despite the policy interest in the progression from an Apprenticeship to HE (Leitch, 2006, p.60), few individuals forge this path (University Vocational Awards Council, 2008; Milburn, 2012). Gittoes (2009) study for HEFCE was the first to draw together data from Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) student records and the Learning and Skills Council individualised learner records (ILR) in a bid to understand Apprenticeship progression to HE statistically. However, there are difficulties with the statistics. Firstly, defining Apprenticeship completion is difficult due to the construction of frameworks with various qualifications and components. Secondly, the data does not identify whether Apprentices who progressed to HE also held other qualifications that helped facilitate progression. There is also an argument as to the accuracy of the statistics. Gittoes (2009) claims his work is likely to be an under-estimation of the numbers progressing to HE while Fuller and Unwin (2012a) argue the data is over-estimated. The data includes not only those who had completed a Level 3 Advanced Apprenticeship but those who had only achieved a Level 2 Intermediate Apprenticeship. As HE entry requirements usually require Level 3 qualifications meaning it is highly likely that the Level 2 completers will have also achieved Level 3 qualifications. Therefore, their admission to HE is most likely to have been based on these non-Apprenticeship Level 3 qualifications. This limits what conclusions that can be drawn on the acceptance of Apprenticeships as a progression route, particularly regarding the currency of Apprenticeships and how HE providers value Apprentices' experiences. Despite the challenges in undertaking such complex statistical work, Gittoes (2009) study possibly most importantly led to further development of the field.

The only major quantitative work in this field in recent years has been conducted by Smith and Joslin (Smith and Joslin, 2011, 2013; Joslin and Smith, 2014; Smith *et al.*, 2015) who tracked five cohorts of Apprentices who had started, and completed, a Level 3 Advanced

Apprenticeship in the five the years from 2004/05 to 2008/09 and had progressed to HE³³. The 2014 study updated the previous work with an enhanced methodology to better capture the complexities of Apprenticeship progression. The work matched the ILR and HESA datasets to identify those individuals who had achieved an Advanced Apprenticeship. There are inherent challenges with complex data matching exercises, such as matching records with slight differences (for example, names) which impacts the reliability of the findings. Furthermore, the cohorts were identified by the academic year they commenced their Apprenticeship rather than completed. This acknowledges the roll-on, roll-off nature of Apprenticeships but also means that the cohorts include Apprentices who entered HE in the year they began their Apprenticeship, therefore, drawing on other qualifications for entry. Positively, the longitudinal tracking helps to show trajectories over time by acknowledging work-based learners' unique patterns of progression and resulting in a more comprehensive dataset than achieved previously³⁴.

Joslin and Smith (2014)³⁵ presents an interesting picture and is the most recent in the series tracking five full cohorts (2005/06 to 2009/10) for three years after commencing their Apprenticeship:

- Overall, 18.8% of the 2005/06 Advanced Apprentices progressed to HE (tracked for seven years) with 11.7% having progressed within three years of commencing their Apprenticeship. This is an improvement on the seven-year progression rate of 15.4% for the 2004-05 cohort (Smith and Joslin, 2013).
- The number of Apprentices progressing to HE within three years of starting their Apprenticeship increased by 30.8% from 3,895 for the 2005-06 cohort to 5,095 for the 2009-10 cohort.
- However, the three-year progression rate dipped from 11.7% in 2005/06 to 9.5% in 2009/10. This reduction was influenced by the significant increase in the numbers of Apprentices aged over 25 who are less likely to progress (5.3%) than 17-19 year olds (12.1%).

³³ Smith and Joslin (2011, 2013) analysed the results of six tracked cohorts of apprentices from 2004-05 to 2009-10 who progressed into HE between 2004-05 and 2010-11. Joslin and Smith (2014) analysed five tracked cohorts of apprentices from 2005-06 to 2009-10 who progressed into HE between 2005-06 and 2011-12. The most recent Smith, Joslin and Jameson (2015) report analysed five tracked cohorts of apprentices from 2006-07 to 2011-12 who progressed into HE between 2006-07 and 2012-13.

³⁴ The time period predates the Apprenticeship reforms heralded by the Richard Review (2012).

³⁵ I have chosen to focus on Smith and Joslin's (2014) study due to its completeness. It is the most recent of their studies for five tracked cohorts whereas the most recent Smith, Joslin and Jameson (2015) includes only partial results for apprentices entering HE in 2012/13.

- Prior to 2009/10, former Apprentices in HE were more likely to study in colleges. The 2009/10 cohort was the first where a higher proportion progressed to university (52%) rather college (48%).
- Between 2005/06 and 2009/10, the number of Apprentices progressing to other undergraduate courses (for example, HNC/HND) dropped by 35% while the number of degree and FD students increased (204% and 102% respectively) reflecting the changing national picture (discussed in Section 1.3). During this period, there was also a national focus on improving the progression rates of vocational learners as part of the widening participation activities of Aimhigher and Lifelong Learning Networks³⁶.
- The proportion of Apprentices studying full-time HE has increased annually. Apprentices studying part-time HE dropped from 79% for the 2005/06 cohort to 66% for the 2009/10 cohort, while full-time study increased respectively from 20% to 32%³⁷.
- HE progression rates at a sector level vary significantly. The highest three-year progression rate for the 2009/10 cohort are from Apprentices in Accountancy (76.2%), Engineering (22.2%), Health and Social Care (8.4%), Business Administration (7.6%), Construction (6.6%), Children’s Care Learning and Development (6.3%), Sporting Excellence and Customer Service (4.2%).
- 44% of the 2005/06 Apprentices who progressed to HE came from areas classified as areas of low HE participation (POLAR3 quintiles 1 and 2³⁸). Apprentices from areas of low HE participation are more likely to study part-time than those Apprentices from areas of high HE participation, indicating an important role in improving social mobility.

The work by Smith and Joslin (2011, 2013; Joslin and Smith, 2014; Smith *et al.*, 2015) provides an exceptional insight into the complexity of progression to HE for Advanced Apprentices and recognises the multitude of factors impacting on progression. While many progress to HE immediately upon completion, for others they may not choose to progress until several years later. The reasons behind these progression patterns may relate to individuals who wish to

³⁶ Lifelong Learning Networks were also supported and funded by HEFCE, with the intention of improving progression to HE for vocational learners and work-based learners and supporting vocational education, learner development and lifelong learning.

³⁷ The remainder were studying on sandwich programmes, presumably full-time although the study does not acknowledge this.

³⁸ The participation of local areas (POLAR) classification groups areas across the UK based on the proportion of the young population that participates in HE. POLAR classifies local areas or ‘wards’ into five groups, based on the proportion of 18 year olds who enter HE aged 18 or 19 years old. These groups range from quintile 1 areas, with the lowest young participation (most disadvantaged), up to quintile 5 areas with the highest rates (most advantaged). The most recent iteration of the classification is POLAR3 (HEFCE, 2015).

remain in full-time employment and require local, part-time provision but more so that these are adults with work responsibilities, home responsibilities and who may be dealing with career challenges and changes (Jameson, Joslin and Smith, 2016). Fuller and Unwin, 2012a, also suggest they may lack the required qualification for HE entry. However, that there are well-respected, nationally recognised learning programmes that offer little in the way of formal education progression opportunities hinders not only social mobility but economic productivity. As the number of Advanced Apprentices is likely to continue to increase, it will be important to explore whether progression to HE is maintained, or increased, in line with the general trends in HE participation.

There are a multitude of studies that suggest individuals with vocational backgrounds experience greater complexities and difficulties in their transition to HE and a higher likelihood of withdrawal when compared to traditional A-level students (Hayward, 2008; Round, Brownless and Rout, 2012) yet the picture is complicated. Round, Brownless and Rout (2012) examined HESA data to compare the experiences of vocational³⁹ and traditional learners in HE and found that while vocational entrants are more likely to withdraw during the first year, for those that pass this milestone there is little difference in completion rates. While overall vocational entrants gain fewer first and upper second-class degrees the pattern is reversed for part-time students. Incorporating socioeconomic background points to the influence of social and economic factors upon outcomes, with degree classification strongly correlating with deprivation. While students with vocational backgrounds have been found to encounter difficulties around their understanding of HE learning, demands posed by specific study areas (such as mathematics), assessment methods and achieving a work-life-study balance (Hayward, 2008), often these difficulties stem from being mature students with additional family and work responsibilities. Research into experiences of part-time and mature students on vocationally related courses are also highly relevant to this work and suggest these students have a highly instrumental approach to HE and question the social aspects of HE (Jones, 2010; Davies, 2013). Roberts *et al.* (2003) identify the importance of self-concept and personal support systems for student retention and achievement and activities that facilitate and promote social and academic integration as part of a student's early experience.

³⁹ Vocational students for this study were those captured by HESA as following a wholly vocational (VCE) programme plus other discretely identified students who have applied with OND/C, GNVQ and NVQ qualifications. It excludes students who have entered with a mix of vocational and other awards.

2.4 Implications and conclusions

The VET sector has a marginalised history with developments reinforcing the demarcation between vocational and academic learning through narrowly defined skills and competencies (Hager and Hyland, 2003). The UK government's intervention in reducing the theoretical elements within traditional Apprenticeships created the opportunity for a narrow, competency-based system resulting in NVQs. The changes in vocational policy and qualifications were fundamental in contributing to the decline in Apprenticeships and the change in perceptions of Apprenticeships as a high-quality pathway for school leavers and young adults. New perspectives and policy in Apprenticeship learning are seeking to establish an Apprenticeship brand from intermediate to higher level skills may, in the future, help to overcome some of these long-held notions. The new Apprenticeship Standards have the potential to create an industry talent pipeline yet if Apprentices below HE level are denied the opportunity to gain respected, accredited qualifications there is a significant danger that a two-tier system is created. There is a need to recognise that theoretical knowledge and understanding must underpin competence on the job, with knowledge being equally weighted alongside skills so as to support Apprentices to progress through their Apprenticeship and generally within their careers. It is vital that Apprenticeships have a value for the individual and in the broader labour market to support educational and employment progression. Perceptions that VET is second best to academic learning affect the social and economic benefits (Lasonen and Manning, 2000) yet individuals following VET pathways have been shown to have equivalent levels of aspirations to those from academic backgrounds, when prior achievement is accounted for (Vickers and Bekhradnia, 2007).

Chapter 3. Theoretical literature relating to choice, learning, identity and agency

The following chapter provides a discussion framed around contemporary literature surrounding educational decision-making, the practice of learning and negotiation of identity. Hodkinson and Bloomer (2002) argue in their work on the intersection of biography, context and workplace learning that people's backgrounds, values and outside interests are highly relevant to their attitudes to learning and work. Although central to one's biography, an Apprenticeship and work are not the only sources of young people's attitudes, aspirations and identities. To understand former Apprentices' experience of the journey from the Apprenticeship into and through HE requires exploring dimensions of the participants' family, work, social networks and their personal history of changing knowledge, skills, aspirations and values. The theoretical framework for this study has emerged by bringing together several perspectives to help understand progression from an Apprenticeship to HE. The overview in this chapter starts with literature surrounding educational decision-making and a consideration of the relationship between structure and agency. This chapter will then move on to explore the social practice of learning and the role of communities of practice in the learning experience. The chapter concludes initially with a review of identity literature, specifically the notion of occupational identity before moving on to explore Archer's (2003, 2007, 2012) work on modes of reflexivity. By structuring the review in this manner, I have sought to present a coherent argument and discussion of a broad field of study. This literature review provides a balance of context, in the sense of the historical and contemporary analysis of theoretical arguments, which have influenced the research study upon which this thesis is predicated.

3.1 Choices and embedded decision-making

The first substantive field with which this literature review is concerned is understanding young people's decision-making across their life course, in particular, the decision to commence an Apprenticeship then progress to HE and understanding what role an individual's social network plays within this decision-making. Despite the tremendous change in social and economic conditions over recent decades, critics have been vocal about the neglect of the role of social structure and an individual's embeddedness in social relations (Furlong, 2009; Roberts, 2009; Smith, 2009). They consider that individual agency in decision-making has been overstated, pointing to the continued influence of structural factors, such as social class and gender, on school-to-work transitions. This perspective presents the argument that the changing nature of education and labour market opportunities has led to new class-based

inequalities while the dominance of individualist values and the rhetoric of choice, has driven individual accountability in managing risk and responsibility (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; Furlong, 2009).

Educational and career decision-making is a complex process. Payne's (2003) review of post-compulsory decision-making explores the considerable variations in how young people make decisions about educational participation; noting differences in timing and the wide variety of factors involved including social, institutional and psychological variables. Decisions surrounding educational participation involve a complex interaction of factors (Ball and Vincent, 1998; Davies, 2003; Fuller and Heath, 2010), yet too often this intricacy is ignored. Individuals are forced to make choices amidst a "puzzling diversity of options and possibilities" (Giddens, 1991, p.3) within an intricate web of information often through mediated experiences. For example, there is a general recognition that HE provides a proliferation of information to help students make choices (Briggs and Wilson, 2007) but the complexity can be overwhelming and deter prospective students from applying (Forsyth and Furlong, 2003a, 2003b; Harrison, 2016). This might be particularly true for those individuals, such as vocational learners, who may not identify with the information presented because it fails to acknowledge their background and potential contributions. James (2000) and Brennan (2001) discuss how choices are often influenced or even constrained by socioeconomic, family and ethnic cultures. Yet, even strong studies can fail to account for the social embeddedness of decision-making, the lived experience of young people and the meanings they attach to their experiences. Bloomer and Hodkinson view decision-making as unstable due to the "complex nexus in which habitus, personal identity, life history, social and cultural contexts, actions and learning are interrelated" (1997, p.46). Unsurprising then is the discord amongst literature of educational decision-making. Some studies find decision-making to be characterised by linearity, stability and rationality (Choy *et al.*, 2000; McInnis, James and Hartley, 2000) while others find little evidence of a stable, rational process (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 1997; Tyler, 1998; Connor *et al.*, 2001).

3.1.1 Variations in decision-making models

Models of decision-making have different emphasises. Economic models, which plays an influencing role in government policy, emphasises individual agency and a rational, evidence-based approach whereby educational choices are seen as investment decisions classically expressed in Becker's (1975) human capital theory. However, the personal and economic benefits from education often take time to accrue and rationalising choice on this basis is

future-gazing (Foskett, Dyke and Maringe, 2004). Economic models are based on the premise of equal access to opportunities and ignore sociological concepts of structure. In doing so, they fail to consider differential returns, labour market bias and attitudes to risk. Furthermore, the benefits of education are not entirely financial but are related to prestige and 'fashionability' (Foskett, Lumby and Maringe, 2003), and for HE, its relationship with social consumption. Critics also argue these models fail to take into account the social construction of educational achievement, the intricate operation of supply and demand, the complexity of human motivation, and the role of social class, gender and ethnicity in decision-making processes (Bourdieu, 1986; Brown and Hesketh, 2003; Smetherham, 2006).

Simon (1955, 1982, 1997, 2000) proposed bounded rationality as an alternative to economic models and sought to predict potential outcomes of decision-making processes. This work illustrates that rationality is constrained by the information available, cognitive limitations and timescales for decision-making which leads to 'satisficing' decisions that are not guaranteed to be optimal but are satisfactory based on individual experience and knowledge, broader context and circumstances, and financial risks and rewards. While bounded rationality roots are within economics, Harrison (2016) applies this work to understanding the complexity of young people's decision-making about HE. Theories of choice which attempt to explore the relationship between structure and agency are of particular interest. These concepts have long been used in the sociology of education to formulate theories of class, status and power within an educational context (see Reay, 1998; Ball *et al.*, 2002). Such theories have led to arguments that middle-class parents have a greater understanding of the education system and the differential impact of attending certain institutions and courses, resulting in young people from such backgrounds being better prepared in the decision-making process (Brown, 1995; Byrne and Rogers, 1996; McDonough, 1997; Reay, 2005).

3.1.2 Choices and decisions framed by social relations

In the 1990s a body of research emerged explicitly concerned with young people's subjectivities and their ability to negotiate 'learning careers' (discussed further in Section 3.3) and to 'become somebody' (Banks *et al.*, 1992; Bates, 1993; Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996; Bloomer, 1997; Bloomer and Hodkinson, 1997, 2000a, 2000b, 2002; Ball, Maguire and Macrae, 2000b). These studies examined school-to-work transitions more holistically in the context of young people's lives and sought a more sophisticated conceptualisation of the relationship between structure and agency. Bloomer and Hodkinson's (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996; Bloomer, 1997; Bloomer and Hodkinson, 1997, 2000a, 2000b, 2002) concept of a 'learning career' stems from

longitudinal research exploring young people's dispositions and decision-making as they progress through formal learning programmes. Through this work, the authors argue that learning careers are developed through the complex interaction of teaching and learning activities with personal dispositions and contexts, structural and institutional conditions, and peer norms. The concept posits the individual as agentic, acting on events, experiences and changing circumstances.

Drawing on the concept of structured individualism (Roberts, Clark and Wallace, 1994) they conclude that the extent of individualisation, that is, the degree to which young people can "formulate and realise goals" is impacted by their structural position (Ball, Maguire and Macrae, 2000b, p.145). In further work by Roberts (2009), he responds to the pervasive rhetoric of a 'poverty of aspiration' among young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, insisting that far from a lack of aspiration, young people's educational choices are influenced by social background and opportunity structures. Studies of educational and career decision-making are frequently concerned with the role of structure and agency in youth decision-making, often stressing the importance of one over the other, with outcomes of post-compulsory pathways being explained in terms of individualisation or, more often, socialisation (Banks *et al.*, 1992; Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996; Bloomer and Hodkinson, 1997).

3.1.2.1 Possible futures, selves and identities

Evans's notion of 'bounded agency' (Rudd and Evans, 1998; Evans *et al.*, 2001; Evans, 2002, 2007) places a greater emphasis on individuals as actors but foregrounds an understanding of experiences in changing social landscapes. In doing so this recognises that individuals have past and imagined future possibilities, they are influenced by contextual factors and institutional frameworks which shape but not determine young people's subjectivities and support or hinder their agency. This connects with Markus and Nurius (1986) concept of 'possible selves' which are "individuals' ideas about what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming" (*ibid.*, p.954). These possible selves may be well-developed or fledgeling, may relate to an individual's view of their career, education, broader social circumstances but importantly they are a manifestation of a person's hopes, aspirations, fears and anxieties. Possible selves provide a future-orientation to decision-making based on possible identities and circumstances but only includes those selves that a person is able to visualise. As such they are embodied and influenced by social networks and relationships, and by intersectionalities such as gender, class and race:

An individual is free to create any variety of possible selves, yet the pool of possible selves derives from the categories made salient by the individual's particular sociocultural and historical context and from the models, images, and symbols provided by the media and by the individual's immediate social experiences.

(Markus and Nurius, 1986, p.954)

Past educational experiences, social background, mental well-being as well as other factors affect a person's perception of what is possible and the possible self they may wish to avoid or embrace (Leondari, 2007). Markus and Ruvolo (1989) position possible selves as the critical connection between self-concept and motivation, playing both a mental and emotional role. They frame an individual's expectations of what selves are possible or not and thus provide clarity of the goal to work towards (or avoid) and influence the development of an action plan (Markus and Nurius, 1986) which they argue is motivating and energising (Markus and Ruvolo, 1989). Erikson (2007) suggests that possible selves are different from constructs such as dreams and aspirations due to agency - the ability of the individual to exert some form of control. Emotionally, being able to imagine the outcome of achieving a specific positive self can bring about feelings that become inseparable from the outcome; as individuals appreciate positive emotions and seek to avoid negative ones. Work by Oyserman and Markus (1990) on delinquent youth found a link between levels of motivation and desirable possible self, particularly when balanced with a feared possible self. Therefore, the fear of an undesirable future is as motivational as positive emotional connections and can push an individual to achieve their goals. They argue that the positive and negative aspects of possible selves have greater motivational properties than merely having an unconnected hoped-for or feared self. As such they view feared possible selves as valuable, even vital, to motivation (Oyserman & Markus, 1990). This approach to identity recognises the self as dynamic, contextually responsive and in a state of flux rather than static and fixed (Markus and Nurius, 1986). At any given time in an individual's life they have a range of potential possible selves, any of which may come into being dependent on circumstances and interventions. Significantly, possible selves are dependent on being validated or dismissed by the people we are closest too (Markus, 2006).

Possible selves are grounded in the psychology of the self and over the past decade have been applied to sociology and education. Li and Kerpeleman (2007) study of the career aspirations of

female college students⁴⁰ highlights the role of family, most significantly parents, on the development of possible selves. They suggest that the ideas parents voice about the value of education can illuminate the link between educational achievement and career goals and provide an insight into the support and encouragement to achieve possible selves. Teachers and lecturers also play a significant role. Interventions in school have been shown to create 'balanced' possible selves and help learners develop strategies to attain their possible selves (Oyserman, Terry and Bybee, 2002) and to help overcome poor parental involvement in their child's education (Oyserman, Brickman and Rhodes, 2007). While teachers and advisors in FE and HE have been found to influence the development of possible selves and provide information and guidance for education or career plans (Rossiter, 2009). Recent work by Papafilippou and Bentley (2017) suggests that female graduates have to adapt their occupational aspirations to match with socio-cultural expectations and struggle to construct viable possible selves within the engineering sector. Acknowledging an individual's orientations towards their future and an ability to imagine themselves in their future recognises the personal power of individuals to understand their central concerns, irrespective of whether these are future orientated or not, connecting with the work of Margaret Archer (2003, 2007, 2012), which will be discussed in Section 3.4.

The work on possible selves also resonates with Hodkinson *et al.*'s (1996) highly influential work investigating young peoples' career decision-making; illustrating that the life course is subject to serendipitous events and false starts. Several theories and concepts developed from this work. Careership theory attempts to reconcile competing tensions between policy-based notions of rational, economic choice and sociological understanding highlighting the constraints of socially constructed pathways (see also Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997; Hodkinson, 1998; Hodkinson, 2008). Careership suggests that decisions are bounded by both an individual's 'horizons of action' and labour market opportunity structures; a process which is context-related and inseparable from an individual's culture, background and life history:

One reason why some young people vehemently reject careers advice is that what is being said to them lies outside their horizons. It does not fit with their existing schematic view of themselves or their perceptions of appropriate careers opportunities. Furthermore the opportunities are not just 'out there' to be chosen.

⁴⁰ The authors recognise the limitations of the sample, being predominantly European American, middle to upper-middle class and from stable family backgrounds.

(Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997, p.33)

Horizon for action “the arena within which actions can be taken and decisions made” (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997, p.34); this is a lens for filtering information, which is both limiting and enabling an individual’s view of the world and the choices available. For example, they argue that factors such as gender and social class may influence whether an individual perceives certain careers as appropriate or indeed how educational opportunities are perceived. Moreover, they view career opportunities as not just available to be chosen but to be created, through local networks and contacts, meaning that while an individual’s horizon is divided by what they can see, it is constantly refined and modified:

What can be 'seen', and therefore chosen, depends on the horizon for action. This, in turn, depends simultaneously upon the standpoint of the person concerned, including habitus, and on the external education and labour market. These are not discrete, for each is a part of the other. Within their horizons, people make pragmatically rational decisions.

(Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997, p.36)

Pragmatic rationality (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996) articulates that while decisions contain elements of rationality, they are constrained by subjective perceptions of opportunities and shaped by individual context. They argue that individuals give rationalising reasons for choices, creating the impression that their decisions are pragmatic yet often they are opportunistic, based on partial information and highly context-related. At the same time, the importance of personal contacts and experiences, family background, culture and life history, and of highly personal and individual feelings and emotions cannot be underestimated. This influential work contends that individuals are bounded by their horizons for action which are determined by work, educational opportunities and personal perceptions of what is possible, desirable and appropriate.

3.1.2.2 Interconnecting influences: agency, relationships and networks

Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000a) further developed this model to suggest three critical interacting fields of choice making: family, home and domesticity; work, education and training; and, leisure and social life leading to horizons for action having both temporal and spatial dimensions. They argue that although most young people in their study displayed a sense of individual choice, in practice their opportunities were stratified:

Social class differences in the modes, processes and points of engagement with the education and labour market permeate this study... too much emphasis given to processes of individualisation may obscure the continuation of common routes and fates.

(Ball, Maguire and Macrae, 2000b, p.145)

While this work offers a more sophisticated approach to understanding the interplay of structure and agency, this is sometimes at the expense of the rich biographical experiences of young people and thus the complexity of the processes of identity construction. Arguably, superficially and selectively considering young people's biographies and overlooking broader social contexts and relationships, accounts may neglect the young person's perspectives and in doing so suggest the opportunity for individual agency is limited. Decision-making is seen as shaped by social class, available opportunities, and identity; which is conceptualised as the outcome of socialisation. The reflexive agency of working-class young people extends only to reconcile them with their predetermined paths, as they come to terms with their careers in what is seen as low-status jobs (Bates, 1993; Bates and Riseborough, 1993a, 1993b). Bates analysis of young female working class carers as "reconstructing fate as choice" (1993, p.23) exemplifies the bias of, commonly, middle-class researchers dismissing VET as a favourable option. In more recent studies, Shildrick and MacDonald (2007) conclude that young people on VET pathways had no interest in academic learning while others have claimed that work-based programmes were perceived as the route for poorly attaining students who were viewed as 'dropping out of education' by their parents, teachers and careers advisors (Hemsley-Brown, 1999; Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2001). These studies draw on dominant discourses related to the academic-vocational divide (Pring, 1995) and, in doing so, construct young people who choose vocational pathways as failures, rather than having made positive choices (Archer and Yamashita, 2003). This contrasts sharply with Unwin and Wellington (2001) who found that apprentices in their study constructed their decision as positive and a reflection of their preferred mode of learning, not of having failed.

Ball *et al.* (Macrae, Maguire and Ball, 1996; Ball, Maguire and Macrae, 2000a, Ball *et al.*, 2002) in their empirical work on educational decision-making, have been highly influential in presenting the embedded nature of decision-making. They suggest that decisions are made at the intersection of social factors underpinned by background, social class and ethnic differences. Furthermore, social and cultural capital, material constraints, perceptions and distinctions all influence the process of choice creating considerable variation in how young

people make decisions and the difference in the element of rational calculation. The importance given to contextual factors and features within which young people construct their lives is emphasised. These sociological accounts of decision-making appear, then, to give less credence to agency; with actions that may seem 'chosen' being determined by external structures, either subconsciously or consciously.

Brooks (2003, 2005) also addresses the theme of social embeddedness in decision-making in work examining how young people discussed career options with their peers. She found young people used the rhetoric of individual choice to justify their educational decisions; but this disguised tension with the influence of family and peers, who played a significant role in informing what constitutes a 'feasible' choice. Brooks (2003, 2005) found that young people were reluctant to discuss their options for fear of being judged negatively by peers who may perceive some options as having higher status and value. Young people having independence and agency in their decision-making is also reflected in the work of Reay and Ball (1998) who identified what they described as a working-class discourse of positioning the young person as 'expert' with parents being reluctant to challenge their child's choices due to a belief that the young people are capable of knowing what is best for them. This is strongly connected to the more muted parental expectations of working-class parents who may hope for educational success for their children but without asserting such wishes (Reay, 2004). The Economic and Social Research Council (ERSC) funded longitudinal study Timescapes: Young Lives and Times (Irwin, 2009; Winterton and Irwin, 2012) explored the interplay and evolution of parental expectations, school, teacher and friendship group influences on education choices and decisions through young people's biographies. Although small in scale, and skewed towards the female middle-class, the work echoes Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000a) in the reflections of the weak familial framing of educational expectations for the less advantaged. Also, they argue that different influences move in and out of view through time; manifesting a precariousness and changeability and revealing a greater need for contingency.

The prominent themes presented above highlight the tension between social structure and individual agency and the extent to which educational decisions are both conscious and seemingly rational. If we view decision-making as a class-based and socially constructed process, educational decisions become situated and more determined by horizons of possibility. Conceivably, a young person from a family with a tradition of HE, attending a school with a high progression rate, who is surrounded by high-quality advice and guidance may be less conscious in their HE decision-making compared to a young person growing up in a

neighbourhood with low HE participation, with early labour market entry patterns who may feel that HE is not for the 'likes of them' (Archer, Hollingworth and Halsall, 2007).

However, individuals function within a complex web of relationships made up of parents, partners, family members, friends, work colleagues, professionals (for example, tutors and careers advisers) and other people they encounter through their work, education and leisure activities. Researchers have long recognised the importance of networks in decision-making. Ball and Vincent (1998) discuss the importance of 'hot' socially embedded knowledge and the 'grapevine' as a means to gather information. They liken this to a 'landscape of choice', where the landscape differs depending on the location of the viewer-participant (Ball and Vincent, 1998). Pollard, Pearson and Willison (2004) discuss the role of networks in career decision-making, with formal networks being conceptualised as professionals such as careers advisers, personal tutors and lecturers and informal networks including family, friends and other 'unofficial' sources. Brook (2005) discusses 'bonding ties' or what Heath, Fuller and Paton (2008) refer to as 'networks of intimacy', comprising of close family and friends, and 'looser ties' consisting of acquaintances, such as work colleagues. Greenbank's (2009) research into the role of social capital in the career decision-making of working-class HE students found that these individuals often had access to network-based knowledge of the graduate labour market, with some choosing not to make use of these sources. Archer (2007) (whose theories will be explored in greater detail in Section 3.4), argues that the main aspect regarding the extent to which people seek advice from, and consider, the opinions of others is the mode of reflexivity they adopt. The individual's mode of reflexivity may help provide an explanation as to why some working-class students did not take advice from professional family members and why some middle-class students are unsophisticated in their decision-making despite having professional networks (Greenbank, 2011). There may, however, be other explanations such as information sources within networks being irrelevant to personal career aspirations or knowledge being outdated.

The traditional concept of the life course, whereby events such as leaving education, starting employment, marriage and parenthood were linked in sequence, has arguably become increasingly 'destandardised' and non-sequential (Nagel and Wallace, 1997; Heinz and Krüger, 2001). The individualist perspective draws on sociologists such as Giddens (1991) and Beck (1992) who refer to 'late modernity' as an era in which traditional structures and certainties have been replaced by a 'risk society'. Giddens (1984, 1991) discusses the relationship between structure and agency in his claim that "the self becomes a reflexive project" (1991,

p.32) whereby how once the lives of young people had greater similarity to past generations have been succeeded by discontinuity and uncertainty requiring a process of reflexively creating and recreating lives in response to change. This has resulted in young people facing more insecurity about their future, with the shift towards 'choice' biographies involving greater decision-making and negotiation (Du Bois-Reymond, 1998; Archer and Hutchings, 2000; Ball, Maguire and Macrae, 2000a; Connor *et al.*, 2001; Dwyer and Wyn, 2001). Du Bois-Reymond (1998) makes a distinction between 'normal' and 'choice' biographies to make sense of an increasingly fragmented transition to adulthood. Drawing on Giddens' (1991, p.63) notion of 'life projects' whereby young people may move between normal and choice biographies as they revise their projects and adapt to changing circumstances. Giddens takes the view that the self 'has to be reflexively made' (Giddens, 1991, p.3) creating a need to sustain a coherent self as people face the task of shaping and continuously revising their self-identities. His work contributed to the view that learning and lifelong learning in contemporary societies should be concerned with the ongoing reflexive construction of the self in response to uncertainty, change and risk.

The prominence given to individual agency is reflected in a shift of theoretical perspective and terminology from the study of 'transitions' to that of individual 'biographies'. The individualist perspective is based on assumptions that transitions and biographies have become more complex and less predictable as a result of rising unemployment and the diversification of educational pathways with the onus placed on individuals to improve their employability (Heinz, 2009). Individuals are often required to make career-related decisions at various points in their lives and are likely to need to revisit and reflect on their previous choices, thus refuting the linearity of career and educational progression. Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001) suggest:

A strong theme which underpins our view of choice is that in reality these choice points are not discrete, unique experiences but are simply part of a complex web of choice and decision-making that links every choice and decision from birth to labour market entry (*ibid.*, p.201).

The significance for this thesis is the importance of taking a longitudinal approach to researching choices, decisions and dispositions to learning and seeking to appreciate ways these can change. It is an approach that is central to this research and raises the question how young people who choose vocational pathways then come to find HE within their horizons for action (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996). The insights from the literature on choice which inform this

study are the concept of choice as problematic and the way in which decisions are shaped by personal agency, structure, networks and individual experiences.

3.2 The social practice of learning

Often in discussions about learning, there is an assumption that learning “has a beginning and an end; that it is best separated from the rest of our activities; and that it is the result of teaching” (Wenger, 1998, p.3). Lave and Wenger (1991) offer an influential conceptualisation of how people learn new activities, knowledge and skills without engagement in formal education processes that stands in contrast to the ‘standard paradigm’ of cognitive learning (Beckett and Hager, 2005). Learning is therefore not seen simply as acquiring knowledge but as a process of social participation. Lave and Wenger’s (1991) model of situated learning proposes that learning involved a process of engagement in a community of practice, comprising both the formal knowledge associated with the practices alongside the tacit knowledge inherent in those practices and the broader values and beliefs of the community. Their work draws on ethnographic examples of apprenticeships including midwives and tailors in which “the practice of the community creates the potential ‘curriculum’” (Lave and Wenger, 1991, pp. 92-93). This work represented a significant shift away from traditional learning theorists who conceptualised the learner as the recipient of teaching, and knowledge as a discrete cognitive process that largely ignored the broader social context. Lave and Wenger’s perspective embraces the notion that learner identity is embedded in context and the learner is a co-participant in the learning process.

Their influential thinking provides a conceptual framework for understanding the complex set of social relationships through which learning takes place, how individuals engage with and learn to function within a community and the process by which newcomers make the journey from the periphery towards the ‘centre’ of that community. Within a community of practice, newcomers move from peripheral to full participation, gradually taking on more responsibility, learning to use the cultural tools associated with the practices of the community, and through these experiences construct their identity as a member of the community of practice. Lave and Wenger (1991, p.40) propose that their work offers “an analytical viewpoint on learning” and throughout this thesis I draw on these concepts to explore the participants’ involvement in learning, to understand their learning experiences, and reflect on notions of becoming.

3.2.1 Defining communities of practice

Lave and Wenger (1991; Wenger, 1998) drawing on situated learning theory to emphasise that

learning is participatory within a community of practice where a particular culture of values, norms and beliefs is constituted through the practice of its members. Two central ideas form the basis for their model of situated learning. Firstly, the notion of 'legitimate peripheral participation':

Provides a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artefacts, and communities of knowledge and practice. A person's intentions to learn are engaged and the meaning of learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in a sociocultural practice.

(Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.29)

This presents a relational view of learning; a concern with social identity, with acting, speaking and contributing in ways that reflect the community. The definition of legitimate peripheral participation is purposefully imprecise: "obtains its meaning, not in a concise definition of its boundaries, but in its multiple, theoretically generative interconnections with persons, activities, knowing, and world" (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.121). This approach facilitates the exploration of the concept in different contexts and for different purposes, in situations where newcomers to a community of practice can be conceptualised as initially participating in a limited way, on the periphery, and gradually involved in more complex practices, or more independently, as they move toward fuller participation. Its flexibility as a concept is evident in the range of contexts in which it has been employed, from apprenticeships to business models (Wenger, 1998), to understanding how children learn masculinities and femininities in gendered communities of practice (Paechter, 2003, 2007). Lave and Wenger's intention was to illustrate how the relationship between legitimate, initially peripheral, participation and the process of participatory learning is a process involving learning an identity - of "learning as becoming" (Hodkinson, Biesta and James, 2008, p40).

Lave and Wenger's (1991) second idea is that learning involves a deepening process of participation in a 'community of practice' to convey how people learn through shared engagement in an activity defined by the negotiation of meanings both inside and outside the community. They contend that:

A community of practice is a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation to other tangential and overlapping communities of practice.

(Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.98)

This definition is also purposefully broad, offering the reader the opportunity to agree their own focus. Communities of practice are a shared enterprise understood by all members involving practice around a specific activity or area of knowledge that generates relationships and a sense of shared identity (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). They do not merely incorporate knowledge, they involve the development of relationships, and they develop around things that matter to people (Wenger, 1998). This view of learning as a process of social participation recognises that learning takes place through participating in a group and within the relationships of that group. As such the context within which this group practice takes place has an impact on the process itself. It is the social participation that enables newcomers to learn from experienced practitioners, and it is the move from the periphery of the group towards the centre of the group that focuses on the potential for becoming part of a different community. As such the social, cultural and emotional aspects of work are central components of the learning process and the construction of identities in relation to these communities.

Some scholars have criticised the model of communities as being too simplistic and inadequate for analysing the messiness of real-life contexts (Handley *et al.*, 2006). Yet the weak definition facilitates invites engagement with the problematic nature of multiple definitions, and exploration of the different meanings which community of practice might have in various contexts. Wenger (1998) stresses that not all forms of joint work could be labelled as communities of practice, but discusses the particular characteristics in order to be considered to be dynamic learning environments. His later work (1998, 2000) develops the theory and provides analytical models of 'dimensions of practice' and 'participation and reification' as constituents of meaning which he introduces to address the under-theorisation. There are three dimensions of practice: mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire, which provide communities with a theoretical structure while maintaining wide applicability. Mutual engagement in practices is the way that the members do things together, the relationships and interactions that shape culture, and the effort that goes into maintaining the complexity and diversity of the community. Joint enterprise refers to connection a group of participants for a common purpose: "a negotiated response to their situation" (Wenger, 1998, p.77) that provides a unifying goal and coherence. It involves finding ways to work together to achieve shared, negotiated goals with mutual accountability. Shared repertoire denotes the continual development and maintenance of ways of doing things that the community adopts or creates that define the community. This framework for understanding the community in terms of "practice is the source of coherence of a community" (Wenger, 1998, p.72). It is

practice, then, that defines the community, and this can be understood by considering the relationship between participation in practice and reification of it. Participation is a well-understood concept; it is taking part and the relationships with others in the context of this process while reification gives “form to our experience by producing objects that congeal this experience into ‘thingness’” (Wenger, 1998, p.72) it is through their interplay that meaningful learning is created. Participation and reification shape each other in the negotiation of meaning; they are inadequate on their own but together compensate for the limitations of the other. Communities do not only participate in those practices which define them but find ways to reify those practices which members of the community then use in the negotiation and renegotiation of meaning - a dynamic and active process. The theory of communities of practice has application in how individuals may move beyond the boundaries of their social background through becoming participants in new communities and represents an opportunity to explore the relationship between ‘structure’ and ‘agency’ (Giddens, 1984) rather than emphasising the influence of one over the other. Individuals are active agents in what and how they learn within a community of practice and some authors have stressed the importance of the reflexive self in responding to learning opportunities both within the workplace and broader environment (Billett, 2001).

However, these theories are not without their critics. Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004) argue that communities of practice fail to adequately engage with an individual’s life history or disposition to learning. Furthermore, Fuller *et al.* (2005) suggest a limitation in community of practice is that it fails to recognise that previously formed beliefs and attitudes are an essential part of what an embedded individual brings to the community. They argue that while Lave and Wenger acknowledge the significance of biography they do not fully develop this idea in relation to particular learners. Fuller *et al.* (2005) contend that an individual brings their identity constructed through prior learning into any new community; adapting and learning to belong through modifying their own identity and impacts in some way on existing members identities. Therefore, becoming is cyclical and feeds into the new community, with the nature of this change depending on the relationship between the individual, the community of practice and the wider context.

While much of the research discussed above relates to workplace learning, it is evident that the findings are also highly relevant to other fields of education since the focus is on learning as social practice. This opens the possibility of looking at the process of learning more holistically by incorporating the notion that individuals come to a community of practice with

pre-existing ideas that will influence what they do and want to do. These studies raise interesting questions in relation to non-traditional learners who bring to their communities of practice a set of dispositions towards education that may have developed across generations (Heath *et al.*, 2009).

3.2.1.1 The limitations and challenges of working with communities of practice

Situated learning theory is rooted in the traditions of symbolic interactionism and social constructionism which emphasises the social construction of meaning (Bloomer, 2001). This social interaction is a formative process of meaning-making, that is, how people make sense of everyday situations in interactions with others and how they act accordingly. An array of studies have drawn on situated learning theory and communities of practice to analyse work-based learning and the relationship between learning and identity formation. However, despite its influence, situated learning theory has several weaknesses. Lave and Wenger assert that learning occurs naturally through participation; however, others have argued that such unstructured learning may not be compatible with the demands of modern society (Fuller and Unwin, 1998). Furthermore, Engeström (2004) contends that a lack of formal knowledge and learning solely by doing promotes an uncritical approach to knowledge and precludes change, proposing instead a theory of 'expansive' learning which combines formal knowledge and interaction with others in authentic situations to enable critical analysis of accepted practice. Furthermore, Fuller and Unwin (2004) have challenged the suggestion that progression from novice to expert is linear and that "all novices are seen as legitimate peripheral participants and all experts as full participants in the community of practice" (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.35). Expertise does not necessarily always equate organisational experience and status (Fuller and Unwin, 2004); expertise is shaped by prior life experience which can result in an apprentice being equipped with different skills prior to entering the workplace. Furthermore, situated learning fails to distinguish between the social identity of the trade and the individual self-identity, and in doing so suggests that moving from novice to expert is a smooth process within a static community of practice. Individuals bring to a community a personal (and sometimes occupational) identity and biography whose norms may complement or conflict with those of the community of practice. In Fuller and Unwin's (2004) study apprentices were strongly aware of and had to reconcile tensions that existed between the values and expectations in the different learning environments of workplace and college. For example, while young people often appreciate the autonomy and responsibility assumed within the workplace the requirement for productivity can impact on deeper learning. Others have

referenced the tension of individuals belonging to multiple communities over the lifecycle; particularly those that collaborate or compete, or have no relations with each other (Handley *et al.*, 2006; Wells, 2007). Participating in multiple communities leads to multiple identities that may generate tension between associated values and beliefs. Belonging to multiple communities means individuals must learn to manage their responsibilities and relationships within the various communities:

we engage in different practices in each of the communities of practice to which we belong. We often behave rather differently in each of them, construct different aspects of ourselves and gain different perspectives.

(Wenger, 1998, p.159)

This picture portrayed in the quote above suggests practices can be compartmentalised with the argument that learning and therefore, identity is fully situated, counteracting the argument that it is transferred across contexts. However, if we understand that knowledge transfers across communities then this interpretation is problematic. Wenger's portrayal of disconnected communities is in contrast to others who discuss the enduring power of dispositions. Margaret Archer's (2003, 2007) theory of the internal conversation explores an individual's agential reflexivity to circumvent constraints, the process of negotiation between structure and agency offers alternative to understanding how individuals negotiate identity through multiple communities of practice. This continual negotiation of identity within and between multiple communities of practice may lead to intrapersonal tensions and contribute to instabilities within the community. Alternatively, a newcomer may adapt their practice to secure a continued sense of personal identity while conforming with community norms through a more contingent form of participation or indeed they may seek to avoid conflict altogether by electing to withdraw from communities of practice which do not complement their identity. Negotiation and navigation of these tensions need to be resolved somewhat if the individual is to achieve a coherent sense of self.

Communities of practice was been borne out of workplace and apprenticeship learning but have also been applied as a lens to understand the HE learning experience (for example, Johnston, 2016; Masika and Jones, 2016). However, its adequacy as an analytical framework has been questioned with Ashwin (2009) arguing that students and lecturers cannot be positioned as members of the same community of practice as this would mistakenly mean that the purpose of HE is about preparing the next generation of academics. However, while HE study is not an apprenticeship for an academic career, students and lecturers are part of a

community of learning, and particularly within work-related HE, academics may play the role of an expert and the students as the novice. Additionally, the HE community of practice is based on principles of the sharing of ideas and arguments, where assumptions are questioned, and students form part of the academic community.

3.2.1.2 Working with communities of practice and networks of influence

Community as a concept is an uncertain term. It is a word which is part of our everyday language, with which we may associate certain moral and ideological judgements, for example, perceptions of accord, collaboration, and local, familiar relationships (Jewson, 2007). While Wenger (1998) recognises that participation in communities of practice may be competitive rather than cooperative, he does not offer any conceptual means for exploring these. Wenger views such conflict as events rather than processes inherent within social relationships, as such sources of tension are limited to that between novices and experts, for example, generational struggles. Jewson (2007, p.72) suggests that network analysis can respond to some of these difficulties, as it places a greater focus on the “relationships, bonds and interdependences between people, groups and institutions”. Opportunities and limitations are not seen as the features of individuals or structures but the characteristics of the networks. Within network theories, focus is given to the concept of power within relationships with power being viewed as network attribute rather than being wielded by individuals. This places power as a two-way process, while power may be typically unequal, this recognises that all network participants have power and influence over other members. Network analysis does not assume either accord or discord but aims to reflect “opposing pressures” (Jewson, 2007, p.72) that recognise network connections may, at the same time, take into account both conflict and cooperation. While I do not claim to use a strict network analysis approach in this study, this type of thinking has helped formed my views about the boundaries and confines of different communities, and their features, of which the former Apprentices form a part.

3.2.2 Expansive and restrictive forms of learning environments

A significant aspect of Fuller and Unwin’s work on apprenticeship (see 2003, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2014) draws on case study research applying both situated learning theory (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and concepts of expansive learning (Engeström, 2001) to contemporary apprenticeships. In using the term contemporary, Fuller and Unwin are making the distinction between contemporary, industrial apprenticeship, and the traditional craft apprenticeships noted in Lave and Wenger’s example of five traditional but diverse apprenticeships. As discussed previously, apprenticeship is a sophisticated learning model involving formal, often off-the-job

learning, delivered by specialist education and training institutions, in combination with informal, on-the-job learning. Fuller and Unwin (2003) highlight the significance of both the informal and formal learning processes for understanding the quality of apprenticeship participation in the teaching and learning environment. Furthermore, they argue that to understand the lived reality of learning in a contemporary apprenticeship we must understand the institutional arrangements (including the nature of the employment relationship), the formal qualifications built into the programme, and the nature of the community of practice. An aspect of this is the assertion is that apprentices should have the opportunity to become legitimate peripheral participants as they journey from the outside to the core of a community of practice.

Fuller and Unwin (2001) have applied the insights discussed above to characterise apprenticeship as on a continuum from *restrictive* to *expansive* claiming this supports the analysis of apprenticeship learning environments and forms of learning experience. Fuller and Unwin also identify a relationship with Engeström's (2001) idea of expansive learning and the achievement of organisational learning and transformation:

The object of expansive learning activity is the entire activity system in which the learners are engaged. Expansive learning activity produces culturally new patterns of activity. Expansive learning at work produces new forms of work activity (ibid., p.139).

These theoretical concepts move us beyond the metaphor of 'learning as participation' (Lave and Wenger, 1991) which works well for traditional craft-based apprenticeships but is less compelling for complex industrial and commercial settings. Fuller and Unwin (2003) argue that unless apprenticeships have an expansive impact on the quality of apprentice participation with expectations for personal development, then the programme will add little educational and occupational value to the lived reality. Fuller and Unwin's expansive/restrictive continuum offers a framework for making sense of the learning barriers and opportunities and to understand how programmes maintain a balance between the ambitions of employer, apprentice and government.

While Engeström's theory focuses on organisational learning, Fuller and Unwin's approach focuses on the learner, aiming to identify the features of the work environment that offer or deny opportunities for learning. As such, they utilise the continuum approach to provide a conceptual and analytical tool for appraising the features of learning environments and an organisation's approach to apprenticeship. They determine that apprenticeships with expansive features include participation in multiple communities of practice, a community of

practice with a shared ‘participative memory’ gained through an apprenticeship, training as a member of an occupational community, a breadth of experience fostered by planned rotations and organisational experiences, and the development of occupational expertise and qualifications with labour market currency (see Table 4 below).

Table 4 The Expansive/Restrictive Framework

Expansive apprenticeships	Restrictive apprenticeships
Apprenticeship is used as a vehicle for aligning the goals of developing the individual and organisational capability	Apprenticeship is used to tailor individual capability to organisational need
Workplace and provider share a post-apprenticeship vision: progression for career	Post-apprenticeship vision: static for job
Apprentice has dual status as learner and employee: explicit recognition of, and support for, apprentice’s status as learner	Status as employee dominates: status as learner restricted to minimum required to meet Apprenticeships Framework
Apprentice makes a gradual transition to productive worker and expertise in occupational field	Fast transition to productive worker with limited knowledge of occupational field; or existing, already productive, workers as apprentices with minimal development
Apprentice is treated as a member of an occupational and workplace community with access to the community’s rules, history, knowledge and practical expertise	Apprentice treated as extra pair of hands who only needs access to limited knowledge and skills to perform job
Apprentice participates in different communities of practice inside and outside the workplace	Participation restricted to narrowly defined job role and workstation
Workplace maps everyday work tasks against qualification requirements – qualification valued as adds extra skills and knowledge to immediate job requirements	Weak relationship between workplace tasks and qualifications – no recognition for skills and knowledge acquired beyond immediate work tasks
Qualifications develop knowledge for progression to next level and platform for FE	Qualifications accredit limited range of on-the-job competence
Apprentice has planned time off the job for study and to gain wider perspective	Off-the-job simply a minor extension of on-the-job
Apprentice’s existing skills and knowledge recognised and valued and used as platform for new learning	Apprentices regarded as ‘blank sheets’ or ‘empty vessels’
Apprentice’s progress closely monitored and involves regular constructive feedback from	Apprentice’s progress monitored for job performance with limited feedback –

range of employer and provider personnel who take a holistic approach	provider involvement restricted to formal assessments for qualifications unrelated to job performance
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Sources: Fuller and Unwin (2006, 2008, 2010)

The expansive/restrictive continuum recognises the multiplicity of factors in contributing to an apprentice learning experience and acknowledges the importance of respected qualifications and a post-apprenticeship vision. Fuller and Unwin’s argument that “expansive apprenticeship will create a stronger and richer learning environment” (2010, p.411) through fostering deep-level learning (Engeström, 1994) and imagination (Wenger, 1998) is convincing and moves beyond the understanding of an apprenticeship as a tightly-bound approach. Wenger’s (1998) suggestion of the importance of the imagination in personal development and identity formation opens the themes of opportunities to reflect on practice, the ability to envisage long-term trajectories and being able to develop the new identities involved in belonging to multiple communities of practice. Wenger suggests that is it through these that individuals can explore new possibilities for action and personal growth, and make sense of their experiences regarding their ongoing construction of biography and narrative. This may be interpreted as connecting with Giddens’s (1984, 1991) work on identity construction (see Section 3.1.1) and his recognition that identity is both robust and fragile, and continuously shaped by stability and disorder whereby the individual must have “the capacity to keep a particular narrative going” (Giddens, 1991, p.54).

Theories of communities of practice, legitimate peripheral participation and the expansive/restrictive continuum have influenced a broad range of studies on work-based learning and have highlighted several limitations. Ahlgren and Tett’s (2010) research to understand work-based learning from both an employer and learner perspective draws on the expansive/restrictive continuum to argue that even in an expansive organisational culture, not all employees are orientated to learning illuminating the interaction between individual learner identity and organisational culture. In work discussed previously, Hodkinson (2004) acknowledges that the learning choices a person makes and their engagement in learning is both constrained and enabled by their horizons for action: “influenced both by the opportunities a person has access to, and also by a person’s perception of self, of what they want to be, and of what seems possible” (ibid., p.7). This acknowledges that a person’s biography and life history influence the way in which they engage with training and education and the reciprocal ways these shape expectations, hopes and aspirations.

A recent study in Australia (Conway and Foskey, 2015) applied an appreciative lens (Grant and Humphries, 2006) to focus attention on apprenticeship relationships in the workplace and learning environment. They suggest that applying this lens facilitated focusing on the qualities of the relationships and an avoidance of the deficit discourse whereby apprentices are framed as “problems to be solved” (Conway and Foskey, 2015, p.407). This work stemmed from an appreciation that the occupational community is an important component in an apprentices’ learning and well-being, and in supporting aspirations for further learning and reducing attrition (Lambert, Vero and Zimmermann, 2012). Conway and Foskey (2015) draw on the expansive/restrictive continuum but relate the conditions to the context for well-being. They argue that positive psychosocial work conditions which are characteristic of expansive environments enable employees to thrive, to be committed to an organisation and actively seek out opportunities to develop. In contrast, unfavourable psychosocial work conditions which are characteristic of restrictive work environments impact on an individual’s capability to exercise agency and obstruct learning (Lambert *et al.*, 2012). Conway and Foskey (2015) conclude that relational dynamics at work can “promote or inhibit the apprentices’ development, not just as a tradesperson developing skills, but also as a person whose needs for relatedness, autonomy, competence, and playfulness are being satisfied” (*ibid.*, p.345). They suggest that apprentices are more likely to thrive in learning environments that combine workplace mentoring, positive feedback, encouragement and support with training based on learner capabilities and connection to personal aspirations and potential.

The interest in the expansive/restrictive continuum in this thesis is focused on the relationship between the former Apprentices’ experience and aspirations, their personal development, and their aspirations for career and educational progression. I am interested in understanding how the features of apprenticeship learning have supported an individual’s agency to consider progression to HE and the role of communities and networks in supporting progression.

3.3 Apprenticeship, HE and changing identity

There is a significant difference with the individuals in this study compared to the construction of non-traditional students in other studies focusing on HE progression. The former Apprentices in this study entered the HE environment equipped with significant work experience and an identity bound together with their work. As discussed in the section above, the relationship between learning and identity is recognised within many learning theories with many studies aiming to understand the contribution of learning environments to a person’s identity formation. Learning is a connective process with different dynamic forces

that suggest we must understand:

how learning connects (laterally) with context and with the life experiences of the learner(s) concerned and, secondly, of how one set of learning experiences connects (temporally) with others that precede or follow it.

(Bloomer, 2001, p.429)

As such, learning cannot be viewed independently of its context. Learning is a journey whereby identity is (re)constructed and transformed and is intimately linked to self-confidence and self-belief not just within academic spheres but also socially and emotionally. Education and work spheres are critical sites for the construction of identity, yet these identities can be fragmented and contradictory, change over time and with context, and emerge through history, experience and other dimensions of biography.

Within this thesis, I make three explicit references to aspects of an individual's identity, and it is beneficial to clarify the different uses of the terms employed. I refer to occupational identity to understand how an individual perceives themselves in relation to their various occupational roles, who a person is and wishes to be as generated from their history of occupational participation. This is shaped by a person's capacities, interests, relationships, routines and by broader context and expectations (Kielhofner, 2002). Learner identity is related to how a person learns, and specifically their views about their ability to learn. Individuals with a positive learner identity perceive themselves as learners, engage with learning experiences and have confidence in their ability to learn. Finally, student identity is more specifically concerned with the HE student identity and belonging to a HE community, of which the development and formation of a student identity is part. Student identity emerges through the journey of HE, initially as a new student and enhanced through the experiences of new spaces of learning, sharing knowledge, critiquing and reflecting on new ideas. Individuals need to learn how they connect with themselves, as students, and how to cooperate with peers and HE staff. Making references to aspects of an individual's identity in this manner seeks to reflect that identity development is a fluid and flexible process (Tomlinson, 2010) and depends on the individual's ability to adapt and relate the self to the needs of a particular role.

3.3.1 Learner identity

As introduced in Section 3.1.1, learning career suggests that an individual's identity is intrinsically grounded in multiplicity, as dispositions to knowledge and learning develop over time (Bloomer, 1997; Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000a, 2000b). This highlights the dynamic way

individuals shape, and are shaped by, their learning and the multidimensional nature of identity formation: “between the multi-faceted and ever-changing contexts of learning and transformations in learners’ dispositions” (Hodkinson and Bloomer, 2002, p.40). Dispositions evolve in relation to learning experiences which can confirm or contradict identities, or 'socialise' young people into new identities. While learning dispositions change as people manage changing circumstances and attach different meanings to learning, individuals do not completely abandon former identities (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000b). Several research studies have employed the notion of learning careers within different contexts. Lawy (2006) re-analysis of data from Bloomer and Hodkinson's original study, emphasises that young people actively construct their learning careers according to their perception of knowledge and themselves as learners. Young people start off with a 'repertoire of motives' (Lawy 2006, p.335), ideas guided by their perception of themselves and learning which become confirmed, transformed or gradually evolve in subsequent learning environments with post-compulsory education being significant in the shaping of learning careers and identities. Social relationships at college or work, the perceived relevance of learning content and the nature of learning are all important factors that influenced young people's identity construction. Similarly, Vaughan and Roberts (2007) found that learning careers are constructed according to dispositions to learning, with learner identities being confirmed or transformed through learning experiences. Crossan *et al.* (2003) draw on a biographical, life history approach to analyse the learning careers of non-traditional adults, demonstrating that while learning careers evolve the transformation of identity is a gradual process and may be fragile and reversible. They argue that learner identities built upon a rejection of schooling are deeply rooted in a need to overcome low self-confidence.

Also introduced in Section 3.1.1, Ball, Maguire and Macrae's (2000a, 2000b, 2001) work illustrates the close intertwining of social contexts as young people develop their multiple identities through their learning careers and their ability to construct reflexive identities. They argue that as the new economy offers opportunities for the reflexive construction of identity, it also produces new inequalities, leading to 'secure' as well as 'fragile' identities. Secure identities are part of relatively stable transitions, often with long-term goals, and a sense of the person they want to become. However, these studies powerfully illustrate the enormous resourcefulness of young people, particularly from less privileged backgrounds. There are commonalities between the studies discussed above, particularly in the recognition of the complex and risky world that young people experience in their post-16 transitions. Learner identities develop in response to experiences and as a result of dynamic and reflexive

renegotiation but against a backdrop of cultural background and social expectations. However, the resourcefulness of young people, the idea of combining and switching identities with apparent ease needs to be treated with caution. Indeed, it is doubtful whether identities can ever be 'secure'. Furthermore, while traditional norms have declined, there are new regulatory regimes in their place which are no less powerful, as exemplified by the new femininities and masculinities and other identities available through popular consumption (Nayak and Kehily, 2008). Style and personal expression are increasingly important to young people as traditional forms of identity diminish and new patterns emerge, for example, an expanding array of pathways with new cultural expectations of youth. However, one of the significant findings of this work is that life domains beyond education and training are highly relevant for the construction of young people's identity, highlighting the interrelatedness of a range of 'careers' embedded in people's lives and recognise that occupational association is an important source of identity.

3.3.2 Occupational identity

The workplace provides a web of social relationships through which individuals acquire an understanding of the behaviours, attitudes, and values inherent in an occupation and experience a process of occupational socialisation during which their new occupational identity develops (Pavalko, 1971; Becker, 1977). Much research on occupational identity draws on the work of the sociologist Erving Goffman (1968, 1969, 2009) who highlighted the significance of occupation and work environments in the shaping of individual identity. In conforming to the social identity of an occupation and the associated values and forms of behaviour, the individual gains a socially recognised position. As with the literature on school-to-work transitions, studies that have explored occupational identity have often focused on either structural or agentic perspective.

Apprenticeships are in many ways, a holistic model of learning with a significant role in identity formation, in terms of occupational identity, personal development and citizenship (Fuller and Unwin, 2009). While the notions of identity formation are evident in the literature of European apprenticeship (Brockmann, 2010, 2013) they are mostly absent in the discourse of English Apprenticeship. However, as studies have demonstrated, an individual's identity in the workplace entails more than their job role and responsibilities, as occupation is interrelated with other life identities (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996; Ball, Maguire and Macrae, 2000b). One example is Parker's (2006) research on Apprenticeship in English professional football which explored how the learning environment shaped identities and engagement in learning and

reproduced forms of hyper-masculinity. A study of adults returning to work after career breaks (Evans, Kersh and Kontiainen, 2004), found that personal biographies were highly significant with the manner in which individuals were able to exploit learning opportunities was dependent on their dispositions towards work and learning, shaped by their biography, educational experiences, family circumstances and previous work experiences. Individuals have the choice to engage or disengage with their learning, and the level of engagement contributes to the decision to adopt occupational dispositions (Billett, 2011) with individual agency and motivation also playing a fundamental role (Chan, 2011). These studies highlight the complexity of workplace learning and serve to improve our understanding of situated learning in VET. Importantly, the studies highlighted above avoid the dualism of structure and agency, instead positioning learners as contributing to learning culture, which in turn informs the individuals' dispositions and identities.

Billett and Somerville (2004) argue that identities are constructed through engagement in the workplace, and that workplace cultures are shaped in return. They suggest that individuals define and negotiate who they are within the communities in which they participate. Learning to act within a community contributes to an evolving sense of self and requires a negotiation of meaning and identity as people learn through their involvement in different communities leading to shifts in knowledge and understanding. They describe this learning process as:

both shaped by, and in turn shapes, individual identities, which directs intentional conscious thought, monitors existing learnt processes and mediates how individuals engage with social suggestion they encounter in and about work (Billett and Somerville, 2004, p.310).

Billett, Smith and Barker (2005) discuss the centrality of work to a person's identity and argue that this extends beyond reflections upon socially desired and recognised forms of work. They suggest that engagement in work, regardless of status or skill level, leads to particular and sometimes significant legacies in terms of individuals' development and generates the link between an individuals' sense of self and their work. Brockmann and Laurie's (2016) draws on two linked studies that explore the construction of learner identities of apprentices, over time (and in different life domains) and within the learning cultures of the college and the workplace. They argue that learner identities are formed through past experiences, the learning culture of the workplace and apprenticeship, and relationships in the settings. They found that restrictive experiences that prioritised workplace skills and minimised conceptual knowledge combined with an unimaginative programme reinforced a vocational learner

identity whereby disaffection in classroom learning became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Conversely, an apprenticeship that encouraged apprentices to embrace theoretical learning and view learning as a stepping stone to higher levels led the apprentices to see their learning as a step to further their career. They draw attention to the idea that vocational learning can have a range of meanings, notably the integration of theory and practice and argue that there is a need to address the academic-vocational divide to overcome the assumption that apprentices reject theoretical knowledge.

Chan (2013, 2014, 2016) offers a body of work in the field of apprenticeships and occupational identity in Australia, recognising that occupational identity is a possible means to trace the development journey of an apprentice from novice to skilled worker. Chan argues that learning as becoming embodies how skill, knowledge and dispositions are matured in expert practitioners leading to the creation of their occupational identity. As Hodkinson, Biesta and James (2008) recognised, learning plays a role in developing a recognisable occupational identity and engaging with specific communities of practice: “learning implies becoming a different person...To ignore this aspect of learning is to overlook the fact that learning involves the construction of identities” (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.53). Studies exploring the contribution of work to identity include childcare, health care, and engineering workers (Colley *et al.*, 2003), hair stylists (Lee *et al.*, 2007), fitness training service provision, knowledge-based, software development and traditional automotive component manufacturing (Felstead *et al.*, 2007). Felstead *et al.* (2007) examined forms of identity work and utilised Goffman (1969) to illustrate the subtle but powerful dynamics of organisations that seek to shape worker identity and workers reciprocal presentation of the self through their role interpretation. They define identity as an “active [rather than a passive] sense of belonging” as a “the process of becoming which occurs through participation in a community of practice” (Felstead *et al.*, 2007, p.3). Much of the above research on vocational identity discussed previously focuses on the perspectives of older adults within the workplace which give impetus to explores this notion within the context of research with young people making the transition from vocational learning to HE.

3.3.3 Student identity

A focal point in this study is the movement from an Apprenticeship to HE and applying the lens of identity underpins the exploration of a former Apprentice’s experience of HE. The fluidity of identity, changing over time and according to situation becomes more significant in a rapidly evolving world (Waller, 2010). As individuals move through their life course from one stage to

the next, the process involves a transfer to a new identity (Ecclestone, Biesta and Hughes, 2010). Becoming a student (see also Barnett, 2007) is inextricably linked to issues of identity as students experience a range of transformations and a process of adjustment; using this lens facilitates a focus on the individual, the personal and the narrative. A significant concern in understanding how students experience HE is how they reconcile any disparity between notions of themselves as learners and what is expected of them as students. Underneath explanations of such issues is a tension between identity as transforming into something else and identity as becoming by building on existing foundations. Crozier, Reay and Clayton (2011) suggests there are three main explanations: students reject 'old' identities in favour of 'new' (Skeggs, 1997); students developing 'dual' or multiple identities to suit the particular circumstances (Grossberg 1996, cited in Crozier *et al.*, 2011); or, students experience gradual and potentially disrupted change over time as the individuals negotiate the world. Drawing on the notion of learning as becoming in research is relatively recent, with Hodkinson *et al.* (2008) providing direction. Learning as a process of becoming recognises that individuals learn through participating in learning cultures and as they learn, the learning becomes part of them, signifying an ongoing process of becoming. They elaborate that irrespective of the setting of learning there is a need to understand the experience from the perspective of both the learner and setting, in order to view learning as an ongoing process, where the past history of both the individual and learning environment have an influence on the present learning. Furthermore, they view learning as being influenced by the wider context of social and economic and policy factors.

Drawing on these notions, becoming a student can be explained as the result of the interplay between social and economic structures that shape individual's lives, the educational institutions and the learners themselves (Crossan *et al.*, 2003, Barnett, 2007). As discussed previously, identity change and transitions are not linear but frequently a complicated, cyclical, individual process that takes place over time. The movement to HE encompasses both a social and personal dimension, and as discussed earlier, it is well noted that some students struggle to engage with the social and academic practices of HE. Work-based learners and those combining work and study may encounter the additional complexity of seeking to 'become a professional' as they learn or enhance their occupational role. This dual role as both learner and worker can be challenging, perhaps even more so when their dual status is not recognised within the HE or work environments.

Exploring 'becoming a student' resonates closely with my research aims in acknowledging that

an individual's experience of HE is a complex, changing state which requires a close understanding of their backgrounds and experiences and foreground this in their own narratives to explore an individual's experience holistically. Learning in HE is a continuing and dynamic process which is central to understanding how students experience HE, emphasising how students engage with, and develop, academic competencies that are beyond the mere acquisition of skills (Hager and Hodkinson, 2009). This process is social, context specific, historically situated and dynamic (Haggis, 2009). Learning is beyond understanding how students meet the requirements of their course and is entrenched in their prior learning experiences. Furthermore, the notion of time in relation to transformations often implicit in narratives of how students become successful learners. Becoming full participants in a community requires time, experience, and participation within a learning community which draws attention to the importance of longitudinal analysis. This changes the emphasis from the point of entry to HE, to recognise the longer transitions required for students to manage if they are to become successful learners.

3.3.4 Interacting, shifting identities

Individuals with Apprenticeship backgrounds enter HE with a shaped occupational identity, yet this may conflict with the student identity. Askham (2008) discusses the conflict between the student and adult identity, suggesting that an adult identity is autonomous, responsible and mature whereas that of the student identity is incomplete, dependent and in deficit. Furthermore, Boud and Solomon's (2003) study of workplace learning recognised the tension of being both worker and learner. They suggest "that having an identity as a learner may not be compatible with being regarded as a competent worker" (ibid., p.326) due to complex issues relating to position, recognition and power. Furthermore, those individuals who combine work and study may find themselves having to inhabit and engage with diverse HE and work communities each with different culture and values. Field (2009) recognises that participation in learning cultivates new and broader social networks, and this connects to both agency and identity in the way that individuals feel they are able to influence and control both their networks and circumstance that shape the capacity for action. Identities are encompassing: they provide an individual's sense of their place within a network or community, are through which interpretations of personal history and made, and ideas about one's future self (Wenger, 1998). Wenger (1998) notes that to understand identity we must recognise the connection to an individual's sense of familiarity and competence within their communities. The academic community is only one of the communities in which the

participants are members; they are engaged in multiple social and work settings which intertwine and interact.

3.4 Individualisation and Agency

Individualisation is viewed as a consequence of social changes in late modernity and is associated with changing social and individual relationships, ideas which have been developed in the sociological writings of Beck (1992), Giddens (1990) and Archer (2000, 2003, 2007, 2012). This work will be considered in this final section as a means to explore the role of personal agency in decision-making and experiences of HE. As discussed in Section 3.1.1 the notion of individuality arises out of the perceived proliferation of choice which has been brought about by modernity, the decline of traditional industrial occupations and the exponential growth in the knowledge economy arguably resulting in individuals having more control over their reflexive biographies (Giddens, 1990). These biographies are perceived to be more reflective of personal identities, lifestyles, life chances and consumption than traditional class divisions. If we accept this argument, we accept that linear, standardised transitions often measured by socioeconomic indicators such as class, have transformed and incorporate a range of complexities spanning family, leisure, work and education (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1990, 1991).

Drawing on the individualisation thesis through the work of Archer (2000, 2003, 2007, 2012), supports a more comprehensive understanding of both an individual's decision to progress into HE from a vocational background and how they negotiate the HE experience. Archer acknowledges the enduring conflict in sociological debates around decision-making and educational transitions, between socially deterministic accounts and those that emphasise individual agency. Her work offers an alternative approach to understanding the role of reflexivity as mediating between individual agency and social structure. Archer's framework suggests that social contexts may influence but not determine an individual's predisposition, preferences and apprehensions in relation to their education and career decision-making. She views personal outcomes as the product of the complex interplay between structure, culture and the reflexive agent and as such the effect on individual lives is contingent and changing, as dynamic as the individual themselves. Archer's (2007) notion of the practice of reflexivity is the internal conversation: "the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) context and vice versa" (ibid., p.4). In other words, a person's ability to reflect upon their circumstances shapes their values and perspectives and influences their actions and decisions. It provides an articulate interpretation

of how individuals make sense of their situation in an effort to navigate their way through the world.

The relational aspects of learning can be addressed by adopting an analytical dualism approach with the intention of creating a distinction between structure and agency. While they causally interrelate, structure and agency remain ontologically separate (Archer, 2003, 2007, 2012). Archer argues that the two primary approaches of social theorists, that represent what she calls upward and downward conflation are fundamentally inadequate. In elementary terms, 'society' either evaporates and is replaced by accumulated individual action or 'agents' disappear and people do no more than act out the imperatives of social norms and structures. In her view, agents and structures are distinct, neither has primacy over the other but they interact and intertwine. A concept central to this is morphogenetic; that society's defining feature is its capacity to change shape through agency, born from her concern in linking structure and agency without reduction and conflation. The morphostasis – morphogenesis sequence draws attention to the reflexive nature of the interaction between agents and their structure (Archer, 2003). Consequently, reflexivity may result in reproduction and reinforcement of recognised structures (morphostasis) or may transform the individual into new thinking or new actions (morphogenesis).

Reflexivity theorists have often been criticised for their lack of empirical evidence, yet Archer's (2003, 2007, 2012) work on modes of reflexivity, is based on empirical research and individual biographical accounts, including a longitudinal study of undergraduates. Through this work, she suggests that social outcomes are the interplay between structure, culture and agency and produced a view of agency based on a typology of reflexivity in an attempt to understand life course decisions and social mobility. The way in which these theories impact on educational and career decision-making and experience is an explanation for the role of agency in social mobility and progression to HE. This view of agency and the modes of reflexive thinking may serve as a helpful source for analysing some of the individual and network accounts in this study.

Archer (2007, p.1) argues that reflexivity as the means by which individuals navigate their way through the world has been "underexplored, under theorised and, above all, undervalued". Archer's (2012) interest in understanding and exploring reflexivity lies not in the day-to-day but in understanding the role of reflexivity in more complex fields such as an individual's decision to become a HE student. Archer's theory clarifies her thoughts on how individuals negotiate their way through different life choices and personal circumstances while being

attentive to the relationship between structure and agency and the mediating role of reflexivity:

The subjective powers of reflexivity mediate the role that objective structural or cultural powers play in influencing social action and are thus indispensable to explaining social outcomes (Archer, 2007, p.5)

Agency is contextualised, with the idea that reflexive practice might hold the key to enhancing life chances and social mobility. For Archer, the social world can no longer be approached through embodied knowledge, tacit routines, or traditional practice and argues that reflexivity is a relative “unacknowledged aspect” of social life (2007, p.4). In this way, reflexivity is part of an inner dialogue, held by individuals in the construction of their identity and as a resolution to the problem of structure and agency; connecting personal concerns to one’s circumstances through the provision of a space in which individuals can make decisions. Human reflexivity is a mediatory means that accounts for how society’s objective features influence individuals to reproduce or transform social structures through their actions. Reflexivity comes in several forms most of which manifest themselves through our ‘internal conversations’. At its most basic, reflexivity based on the premise that all neurotypical people talk to themselves within their own heads, usually silently and from an early age which Archer refers to as ‘internal conversation’.

Archer (2012) acknowledges that as individuals we all engage in reflexivity, making a distinction between the everyday thought processes that we all engage in and the subjective powers of reflexivity that mediate the role of objective structure or cultural power in social activities such as educational and career decision and the decision to participate in HE. This is the complicated process that allows individuals to have some governance over their lives through their evaluation of their social context, in light of their broader concerns, and adjusting these in relation to their circumstances. In this way, individuals are not wholly determined by structural forces but have causal power as agents in a relatively structural world. Yet, Archer (2012) remains conscious of how structural factors can act as deterrents to particular courses of action. From this perspective, individuals modify their ambitions in relation to perceived contextual feasibility but are more active than passive in their adjustments in order to meet individual projects. It further acknowledges that some social forms and ways of life can generate greater reflexivity and agency than others, therefore, placing the role of agency as a mediating factor between free will and social structure, avoiding a structuralist or individualistic approach.

This study is concerned with the socially and occupationally embedded nature of educational participation and a focus on the former Apprentices' individual and nuanced learning careers and biographies situating them within personal and collective aspects of learning participation. The interplay between personal subjectivity and broader structural factors in this group of non-traditional students is a clear focus of the study with Archer's work (2003, 2007, 2012) provided a useful lens. As such, the following section explores in greater depth her work on modes of reflexivity.

3.4.1 Modes of reflexivity

Archer (2007) perceives reflexivity as fundamental to individuals' negotiations of everyday life and their ability to determine future courses of action. Her view is that reflexive inner dialogue is responsible for delineating our concerns, defining our projects and leads to our social practices. This agential reflexivity actively mediates between our structural and cultural circumstances and what we make of them, so there is no single and predictable outcome. Individuals apply their reflexive capacities in different ways. The manner in which external contingencies intervene on patterns of action in combination with individual subjective reflection is bound to lead to various outcomes. As such, Archer defines her modes or typology of reflexivity as tendencies and trends rather than being predictive categories. Archer argues that there is no correlation between an individual's dominant form of reflexivity and socioeconomic background, but states that "regular conduct of each kind of internal conversation generates a patterning of social mobility over the life course" (Archer, 2007, p.100). Archer's most recent work (2012) builds on her previous empirical studies and cautiously separates the participants in her studies into four modes of reflexivity which can be characterised as:

- Communicative reflexives: those whose internal conversations invite completion and confirmation by others before leading to courses of action.
- Autonomous reflexives: those who sustain self-contained internal conversations that leads directly to action.
- Meta-reflexives: those who are critically reflexive about their internal conversations, and critical about the prospects of effective action in society.
- Fractured reflexives: those whose internal conversations intensify their anguish and confusion rather than leading to purposeful courses of action.

These are not mutually exclusive forms, and Archer's most recent work found that her participants drew on more than one mode of reflexivity "on different occasions and in different situations" (2012, p.12), but that individuals tend to have a dominant mode. Despite the caveat that forms of reflexivity are not predictive, Archer (2007) tends to utilise her definitions as though they are character identifiers which suggest a fixed mode rather than dynamic understanding with modes of reflexivity helping to unlock everyday mental activities:

'mulling-over' (a problem, situation or relationship), 'planning' (the day, the week or further ahead), 'imagining' (as in 'what would happen if...?'), 'deciding' (debating what to do or what is for the best), 'rehearsing' (practising what to say or do), 'reliving' (some event, episode or relationship), 'prioritising' (working out what matters to you most), 'imaginary conversations' (with people you know, have known or known about), 'budgeting' (working out if you can afford to do something, in terms of money, time or effort) and 'clarifying' (sorting out what you think about some issue, person or problem).

(Archer, 2012, p.13)

If we apply these modes to an action of accepting a new job, we can explore how individual action may differ. The communicative reflexive would discuss with a partner or trusted friend before making a decision, the autonomous reflexive internally confirms whether it is the right position for them and immediately accepts the role, the meta-reflexive who contemplates the opportunity in light of their social values or the fractured reflexive whose indecision leads them to turn the opportunity down to stay within their present employment. While Giddens (1990, 1991) portrays reflexivity as rationalistic, Archer views the notion of reflexivity in decision-making in relation to an individual's 'concerns' in which potential outcomes are framed by what matters to us. Fundamentally, reflexivity is not homogeneous, and the dominant mode varies with the individual's context, their desire for 'continuity', 'discontinuity', or 'incongruity', their ultimate concerns, and ultimately the compatibility or incompatibility of these with the person's natal backgrounds. Each mode of reflexivity has very different collective consequences for the individual, for example, distinguishing patterns of social mobility (Archer, 2007).

Autonomous reflexivity is associated with independence; individuals are reflexive agents whose internal conversations lead directly to action with little input from others. Archer describes this "a personal power, a generative mechanism fostering upward social mobility" (2007, p.192), as such work and employment are highly relevant. Archer asserts her

participants who closely matched this category were focused on this sphere of their lives above others, stating that the “interviews revealed how much of their time, thought, effort and, indeed of themselves these subjects invested in their working lives” (2007, p.193). A further characteristic is that of self-reliance with individuals being satisfied that they possess the innate abilities and capabilities to achieve the courses of action to which they aspire. However, while an individual’s aims may be one of ‘getting on’ this may ultimately not be achieved due to miscalculation or circumstances beyond the person’s control. Archer views ‘contextual discontinuity’ as the most important condition for an internal dialogue which is conducted alone and leads to a course of action. One aspect of this is that individuals identify themselves as separated from the environment and society within which they operate. The very being of discontinuity in one’s life deprives the person of a network of individuals who are similar enough to them to act as interlocutors. However, Archer sees this discontinuity as being of two faces: partly forced and yet partly encouraged. This leads to autonomous reflexives finding themselves confronting new experiences without support or guidance to draw on. Thus, the individual must then further rely on their own resources. Experiencing discontinuity and having the confidence to manage it generates a self-confidence which may further prompt the individual to seek new experiences.

Communicative reflexivity is associated with trust and reliance upon others as individuals as reflexive agents share their internal conversations, their ‘thought and talk’, with others and require confirmation or approval before action. Archer perceives communicative reflexives to be the least socially mobile, but this is not the result of passivity or default position when other things fail, as it entails as much effort and deliberation as other patterns of mobility. While communicative reflexives originate independent internal conversation, these are completed interpersonally. Distinctive to this category is how individuals externalise deliberative processes, share difficulties and discuss decision-making, and value the maintenance of close links with family and friends. Archer suggests that the membrane between individual and group life is delicate. She observes that communicative reflexives exhibit contentment and ease with the accommodation of their work and leisure concerns. Their ruminations are about how their circumstances may be improved rather than contemplating self-improvement. This is placed in opposition to a meta-reflexive who puts the self and the potential for change as a central concern and autonomous reflexives who consider self-improvement only if it results in the achievement of personal goals. This is a relational property emerging from a biographical connection which generates similarity and familiarity: “they speak in the same way, share the same word meanings, draw upon a commonwealth of references and a common fund of

relevant experiences” (Archer, 2007, p.171). The individual's close network of ‘similar and familiars’ have a strong understanding of their concerns and deliberations and are likely to offer advice that is reflective of relationships and circumstances.

Meta-reflexives are individuals who are critical of their own understandings, values and beliefs as well as those held by others. This mode is associated with spirituality and membership or participation with religious or environmental organisations. Archer claims that acute meta-reflexives identified values as their most significant life concerns. As such they tend to espouse a critical view of the influence of wider contextual and societal circumstances in their internal conversations. Meta-reflexives are more likely to seek out employment and work opportunities that are in accordance with their deeply held values rather than in the pursuit of upward mobility. According to Archer, being attentive to seeking to achieve their ideals is a function of this mode. Meta-reflexives are presented as ‘loners’, while they have a clear outlook on life driven by values they are also defined by their ‘contextual incongruity’, an incongruity between their aspirations and contextual factors that can obstruct attainment. Archer (2012) suggests that meta-reflexives are dissatisfied with their family’s *modus vivendi* and seek to disrupt rather than replicate their natal backgrounds, they desire their imagined family to be characteristically different to the one they grew up in. Consequently, they search for difference rather than familiarity and are drawn to new experiences, vocations and ‘causes’. Archer’s work suggests that meta-reflexives have been raised in stable families⁴¹ but were encouraged to develop their own stances on issues and theorises that meta-reflexives are the best candidates for potential morphogenesis.

Fractured Reflexives represents the breakdown of purposeful reflexivity and often involves an individual drawing from earlier negative life experiences. Fractured reflexivity is more likely to result in internal conversations that provoke trauma, upset and distress, and fail to lead to action. Archer suggests “the persistence of fractured reflexivity of any form is not only painful in itself but extorts the accumulated penalties of passivity” (Archer, 2012, p.252). According to Archer, fractured reflexives are unable to act agentially to direct or control enablements or constraints and as such fail to manipulate them to support their configurations of concerns. Archer suggests that individuals suffering from most forms of fractured reflexivity⁴² have the

⁴¹ Archer (2012) defines this stability in opposition to the instability experienced by autonomous reflexives who had independence forced upon them as a consequence of family breakdown.

⁴² Archer (2012) identifies three categories of fractured reflexive:

- Displaced Reflexive – where an individual’s usual mode of reflexivity becomes no longer effective.
- Impeded Reflexive – when changes to external conditions lead to a breakdown in the effectiveness of their internal conversation.

potential to return to their usual mode with the assistance of others.

In Archer's most recent work (2012) she articulates a connection between changing modes of reflexivity and socialisation, arguing that socialisation is decreasingly able to prepare young people for occupational and lifestyle opportunities. Archer's view is that for the educated youth, communicative reflexivity is becoming harder to sustain due to the demise of community which has resulted in reduced social solidarity and 'contextual continuity'.

However, this overlooks the impact of social media on relationships. Conversely, autonomous reflexivity has endured with its practitioners being able to react to the growth in social and geographical mobility presented by globalisation and the growth of 'contextual discontinuity'.

Archer's approach is particularly relevant to this thesis due to her proposition that particular forms of internal conversation contribute to individual social mobility. Archer is concerned with exploring how structural and social properties influence the courses of action that individuals adopt; noting how objective structural or cultural powers are reflexively mediated. Archer (2007) contends that the difference lies between agents who are active and those who are passive, those individuals who exert power in their own lives compared to those to whom things happen. However, these are binary positions with little room for fuzzy or contingent areas and offers little in the way of how individuals utilise modes of reflexivity at critical points in their lives. Archer's aim to understand and explain differences in social mobility through forms of reflexivity has led some to argue that the structural constraints are at times overlooked (Elder-Vass, 2007).

3.4.2 Utilisation of Archer's modes in studies of learning

The following section presents a critical discussion concerning the incorporation of Archer's modes as a framework for the analysis of learning in existing literature. Lockett and Lockett (2009) draw on modes of reflexivity in analysing their research into mentoring programmes in South Africa. They claim that traditional learner theory has historically prioritised learner cognition or the broader learning context which has overlooked the learner as agent. Lockett and Lockett's (2009) work supports Archer's (2007) claim that there is no observable relationship between socioeconomic circumstances and the modes of reflexivity utilised. They also conclude that individuals tend towards a dominant mode but that individuals do not tend to fit neatly and exclusively with any one mode. Furthermore, in not identifying any people

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- Expressive Reflexive – few individuals would fit this category as it demonstrates little appreciation of the self in society.

who displayed fractured reflexivity, they suggest that a successful HE entrant would be unlikely to exhibit this mode due to fractured reflexives displaying “the inability to focus on their work” (Luckett and Luckett, 2009, p.478). However, this does not take into account whether students may become fractured during their HE experience and the impact on learning. They further identify a movement from communicative towards autonomous reflexivity as individuals develop their personal identities and progress into employment. However, they recognise that issues with sample size and rigour require further work to validate their findings.

Dyke, Johnston and Fuller (2012) utilise an Archerian lens to re-analyse data from the Non-Participation in HE Project to understand the navigation of educational and career pathways, revealing that individuals exploit changing modes of reflexivity in different situations and at different times. Of particular relevance to this thesis is their claim that in focusing on social networks rather than individuals, they were better able to study an individual’s reflexivity in relation to wider networks. Unlike Archer’s empirical work which identified modes of reflexivity through individual biographical accounts, this study had greater access to network data allowing the research team a broader insight into behaviour and decision-making. My PhD research study has also aimed at a broader understanding of an individual’s decision-making and experience through exploring how ‘networks of influence’ have impacted on participants’ journeys into and through HE. Dyke, Johnston and Fuller (2012) encountered difficulty with Archer’s description of ‘reflexives’ due to their perspective on the fluidity and flexibility of modes of reflexivity which they argue contrasts with Archer’s underlying assumption of longevity to dominant modes. They argue that a focus on the individual more clearly defines a mode of reflexivity than their longitudinal network study suggesting that taking an individual’s perspective on mode of reflexivity may simply magnify one particular mode. They helpfully suggest that individuals are proficient in accessing different modes in different contexts and over the life course, with the network as opposed to individual data, providing a more nuanced understanding of the influences on decision-making. Despite their critique, they maintain that employing an Archerian lens for analysis was a productive means of distinguishing between various forms of reflexivity. My thesis supports Dyke *et al.*’s (2012) critique while recognising that an individual’s mode of reflexivity is responsive to the relevant contexts, options and composition of networks at the time.

3.4.3 Critique of Archer’s modes of reflexivity

Sayer (2010) is critical of Archer confining modes of reflexivity to four categories and suggests this has the potential to preclude other possibilities. Flam (2010) furthers this critique,

previously acknowledged by Archer (2007, 2012), that particular modes appear less compatible with some of her participants which implies that the inflexibility in modes might, in certain circumstances, be obstructive. It may be more constructive to consider modes not as a preferred way of being, but as four contrasting reflexive positions. Archer (2012) responds to these criticisms and elaborates on her understanding of the four modes and provides further evidence of her consideration of alternative forms and a broader review of additional variations.

Caetano (2015) offers a recent critique of Archer's work and acknowledges several limitations including "the weak role ascribed to social origins and to socialization" (ibid., p.70) arguing that the role of structural influences on the interaction between structure and agency is only explored theoretically and with substantial malleability. She further suggests that Archer largely removes the presence of society from internal conversations with an individual's mental structure not being reflective of their social conditions: "the non-acknowledgement of the internalization of exteriority processes and of other social mechanisms mediating structure and agency" (ibid., p.70). Caetano claims that Archer limits the process of mediation between structure and agency to reflexive discussions, ignoring external conversations and interactional dynamics. She further challenges: "the strong emphasis on contextual discontinuity and incongruence in the analysis of social change" (ibid., p.70). Caetano suggests Archer's arguments around increasing contextual discontinuity and decreased contextual continuity, diminishes the significance of social origins and suggests upward social mobility is increasing which conflicts with other work on social structures (for example, Atkinson, 2010). Archer's notion of the internal conversation as the source of reflexivity contributes to my theoretical standpoint with Archer's four modes of reflexivity forming a core aspect of the analytical framework for the network case studies.

3.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study is fundamentally concerned with how former Apprentices come to follow a pathway to HE and how they negotiate becoming a student within the HE system focusing closely on the reality of their lives. This process of transition and negotiation involves reflection, realisation, and in some circumstances difficult progress against the odds (Bowl, 2003). This chapter has presented a review of the existing literature recognising that learning and career journeys are highly complex processes which are rarely linear or sequential. Young people encounter numerous choices and must make decisions based on a multitude of, often confusing, educational and work opportunities. For many, these decisions have been made

against a backdrop of high youth unemployment, flexible and precarious labour markets, and increasing costs of HE. However, many studies which focus on the continued effect of structural influences on young people's decision-making have left little scope for agency and give the impression of relatively smooth transitions. Conversely, other research from an individualist perspective presents young people as reflexively shaping their education and career pathways in a strategic, goal-directed way. Studies have also demonstrated that learner identities may change over time, in response to different life events and different learning environments. Simplistic conclusions that young people have been 'socialised' to prefer vocational courses, manual work or 'low-skilled' jobs (as opposed to academic pathways and high-status jobs) constructs these young people as non-academic or anti-learning and dismisses vocational learning as a positive choice. Often this might reflect a researcher's own prejudice and a reinforcement of the discourse of the academic-vocational divide.

I have drawn on concepts such as structured individualism and bounded agency as these capture the ways in which young people's actions may be influenced and shaped by socio-economic background, gender, cultural values and institutional frameworks. Bounded agency is a particularly useful concept as it emphasises individuals as actors within changing social landscapes and as having past and imagined future possibilities which guide their present actions; linking both to possible selves and modes of reflexivity. Possible selves are sites of both agency and social conditioning. They are co-owned with an aspect of their power being drawn from whether other people authenticate, affirm, ignore or threaten them. Involving an analysis of possible selves within the theoretical framework facilitates an understanding of meaning and significance, provides an insight into intentions, what an individual is seeking to achieve and whether they feel they are moving towards this. Furthermore, the creation of possible selves is often facilitated through personal relationships and networks and connected to how an individual may envisage themselves within a community of practice. This recognises that individuals may expand their possible selves as a result of learning within a community of practice. Negotiation of identity is a core facet of communities of practice and, I would argue, makes communities of practice ideal for exploring identity and belonging through possible selves. The former Apprentices' were engaged in multiple communities of practice, each of which influenced their developing identities, scaffolds their learning experiences and contributes to their becoming a student.

The final section introduced Archer's (2003, 2007, 2012) modes of reflexivity as an approach to understanding the role of reflexivity in mediating between individual agency and social

structure. This framework suggests that social contexts may influence but not determine an individual's predisposition, preferences and apprehensions in relation to their education and career decision-making. Her work provides a useful lens for exploring the socially and occupationally embedded nature of educational participation and the former Apprentices' learning careers, situating them within personal subjectivity and broader structural factors. Together this framework is utilised to understand how the former Apprentices construct their identities facilitating an exploration of past, present and future selves, alongside understanding the control over their choices and decision-making.

The theoretical framework for this study relates predominantly to decision-making, identity and becoming, understanding how variations in individual experience may affect future trajectories and critical differences in the way individuals experience education. The framework is multidisciplinary, drawing from the fields of sociology and psychology which provides a strong underpinning for the interpretive, engagement and analysis process. This multidisciplinary approach emerged during the data collection and analysis process when exploring the former Apprentices' biographies and experiences prompted a more detailed consideration of the interconnections between individual and network representations of decision-making, work and education. It became evident during the study that to adequately develop the analytic explanation closer attention to the psychological aspects of becoming and identity was required. In some ways, this is not a surprising development but importantly recognises that the theoretical framework is grounded directly in my engagement with the data rather than predefined according to disciplinary background.

The research design, which is discussed in further detail in the following chapter, was planned to involve several perspectives and to protect against any simplistic interpretations regarding the analysis and construction of identity. This in-depth biographical approach has facilitated an exploration of the processes through which learner identities are formed over time, through particular learning experiences and environments, so that we can better understand former Apprentice's dispositions to learning and acknowledge their changing nature.

Chapter 4. Methodology and methods

This chapter presents my ontological, epistemological and methodological position and considers their influence on the research methods employed. I will demonstrate how I come to hold the values that I do and the impact of these on the research and the methodology employed. In the subsequent sections, I will clarify how the study was conducted and outline the sampling approach including detailing how I gained access to the research participants. I will also introduce the research design, a mixed-method, narrative case study approach, intended to explore the different journeys former Apprentices⁴³ have taken which have led to the desire to pursue and the capacity to gain a HE qualification. The chapter then moves on to consider the problems encountered in the methodological and interview process and in dealing with the data generated. A reflexive discussion of pertinent ethical considerations closes this chapter.

4.1 Ontological, epistemological and methodological underpinnings

The central aim of the study has been to explore the experience of individuals who have followed an Apprenticeship pathway into and through HE to gain an in-depth understanding of the multifaceted influences on their learning careers and to explore what ‘becoming’ an academic HE student means for them. This has been led by my underlying belief that we need to listen to individual stories if we are to gain an insight into educational experiences; to understand to how experiences and networks influence aspirations; and, how individuals experience the academic practice of HE and the impact on their (re)construction as academic learners.

Thinking about how best to explore the research field prompted reflection on my own beliefs, values and epistemology. My interest in individual’s experiences of VET pathways and in particular their interests and meanings compliment a social constructionist view of meaning-making existing through people’s engagement with an often-changing world (Pring, 2004). My career in social and educational research has embraced the qualitative paradigm and the rejection of an objective ‘reality’ which places the researcher in a neutral, impartial position. Through my professional work I have found myself reflecting on the way I, as a researcher, interact with my participants and how this impacts on the participant’s construction of

⁴³ Throughout this thesis I will refer to the participant who has made the journey from an Apprenticeship to HE as the ‘former Apprentice’ or ‘participant’ this is in contrast with the participants drawn from the ‘networks of influence’ for the case studies who will be referred to as ‘network participants’.

meaning and experience. We live in a socially connected world, which is constructed through our interactions with others and where we attach meanings to situations and events (Blumer, 1979). Our social reality is defined by our interpretations of structures including rules and processes, dominant values and discourses and organisational roles and occupations, forming a web of interlinked contexts at different levels in society. As such, social structures are shaped and being shaped by the meaning-making of individuals who simultaneously move within a variety of contexts – social worlds which may collide and conflict. Our individual identities are negotiated within these unique social contexts, themselves shaped by societal rules and values (Bruner, 1990). It is important to understand the role of cultural, social and historical contexts in shaping the construction of our experience of reality and the concepts we use to understand it:

Often these subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically... They are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interaction with others and through historical and cultural norms.

(Creswell, 1998, p.8)

I recognise that I have clearly favoured methodologies that acknowledge the importance of context and social interaction in the construction of meaning. My guiding assumption is that social reality is not 'out there', independent of the knower but is constructed by, and between, personal perspectives based on experience that may change over time (Gergen, 1999). I am guided by a concern to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experience of individuals "from the viewpoint of those who live it" (Schwandt, 1994, p.118). I have found myself critical of claims that the nature of existence can be identified and studied, and an absolute knowledge can be uncovered through systematic and rigorous enquiry. This favours a social constructionist position which acknowledges "that the ways in which we collectively think and communicate about the world affect the way that the world is" (Elder-Vass, 2012, p.4).⁴⁴ Constructionism reflects my view of how knowledge and meaning are constructed as individuals engage with the world, as a collective generation of meaning. Meaning or truth cannot be described as objective nor subjective; it is not created but constructed based on our interactions with the world and the objects within it (Crotty, 1998). While the world and objects are meaningless, they help us as individuals, to individually and collectively generate meaning; our meaning emerges from our interactions and relates directly to it. As such, theory

⁴⁴ While social constructionism and constructivism are sometimes used interchangeably, constructivism views individual's as mentally constructing their 'world of experience' through cognitive processes whereas social constructionism emphasises the social rather than the individual (Young and Collin, 2004).

is consistent with reality as experienced by individuals. Constructionism urges the researcher to focus on the object under study intently, to move beyond constrained conventional meaning one associates with the object, to be open to new or richer meaning; to reinterpret and be curious.

There is also a social origin and character to meaning-making, we are born into a world of meaning and how we engage and make sense of our world has a historical and social context. This approach recognises that our individual circumstances affect our perception and construction of reality and that meaning-making is complex and varied. It also acknowledges the role of personality and personal experience as well as social, historical and institutional factors and in the development of experience. Social constructionism emphasises the role of culture; it shapes the way we see and even feels things and impacts our view of the world. When something is identified as being socially constructed, we acknowledge that it could be constructed differently and can demand changes to this construction (Hacking, 2000).

However, I think it is important to recognise that paradigms can be placed along a continuum; our assumptions about the nature of reality, the status of human knowledge, and research methods often do not fit neatly into one camp or the other. Social constructionism is not a singular concept; instead, there is a span of thought each with different emphasis and perspectives.

Constructionism is the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent on human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context.

(Crotty, 1998, p.42)

This excerpt from Crotty highlights the social nature of the more typical constructionist viewpoint. Constructionism can range from a more realist stance in which a concept of reality must exist outside of discourse to a more deconstructionist view whereby we cannot make claims about a world that exists beyond our descriptions of it. I am of the opinion that humans are conscious of their actions and constructions; they are beings-in-the-world, and as such, there is intersubjectivity as they construct meanings together upon the world in which they live (Crotty, 1998). The work of Elder-Vass (2012) has been influential in my epistemological and ontological thinking, and the degree of compatibility between social constructionism and realism. Elder-Vass's notion of realism is the "belief that there are features of the world that

are the way they are independently of how we think about them” (ibid., p.6) yet radical constructionists deny any such features, leading to a discordancy. Elder-Vass argues for a more realist social constructionism following Bhaskar’s lead (1989) who contends that critical realism implies a sort of social constructionism. This work leads to moderate constructionism with the effect of giving a more productive and plausible account.

One of the challenges for social constructionism, as Crotty (1998) demonstrates, is how different perceptions of the seemingly same reality can coexist, raising the issue of true or valid interpretations. Social constructionism contrasts with the perception that research can uncover an objective truth. Instead contending that appropriate methods of inquiry can bring useful interpretations, liberating interpretations and even those interpretations which may be fulfilling or rewarding but not “true or valid interpretations” (Crotty, 1998, p.48). Pring (2004, p.59) suggests that different perspectives provided by participants should be rendered equal and that “truth or falsity does not and cannot come into it”. He also suggests researchers employ a ‘reality check’ on socially constructed meanings by ‘stepping back’ from subjective perspectives and questioning whether an objective view exists “independently of my wishing it to be so” (2004, p.61)

I recognise my preference for research that values the understanding of individual experience and the meanings that individuals give to these experiences. As suggested by Plummer (2001), I am seeking out ‘human documents’ that are “account[s] of individual experience which reveal the individual's actions as a human agent and as a participant in social life” (2001, p.3 quoting Blumer, 1979). As such, I consider the methodology and methods chosen to offer the ‘best fit’ and provide the opportunity to address with sufficient depth the research objectives. My interest in personal experiences, understandings and meanings has consequences regarding the theoretical framework which could sensibly be employed and ruled out certain methodologies, which in turn constrains the methods that could be used. The design was also influenced by the limitations regarding the potential sample and issues in gaining access to a sample, both of which will be discussed further.

4.1.1 Methodological underpinnings

The study’s methodological approach is qualitative as I feel the study questions can be best answered through an in-depth longitudinal study. However, in rejecting ‘false dualisms’ (Pring, 2004), the research will draw on quantitative sources to ensure the study is grounded within the current context. As discussed in Section 3.3, the work of Joslin and Smith (2011, 2013,

2014; Smith *et al.*, 2015) frames the general trends in the progression from an Apprenticeship to HE and has been drawn on to support recruitment and sampling. These sources have highlighted trends, such as the nature of, and growth in, HE participation amongst the Apprenticeship community and as such have helped to shape the direction of this research.

The methodological approach that sits under the paradigmatic assumptions outlined above and allows an exploration of participants' experiences, meanings and understandings align itself with interpretivism (Lincoln and Guba, 2003). Interpretive methodologies welcome the subjectivities involved in the interpretation of (most often qualitative) data to attain a deeper understanding of meanings by comprehending the whole subject in all its richness, depth, and complexity and through understanding the social milieu involved in a particular phenomenon. Interpretivism views individuals as actively constructing their social world by its nature invites researchers to draw on methods that can explore events through the eyes of participants. Contexts are seen as fluid and changing rather than fixed and static with events and behaviour being affected by the social context. However, peoples' understanding of their social world is bound by the limits of language and discourse and as such many of the methodologies associated with this approach aim to portray the particular meanings of the participants. Geertz (1973) refers to the detailed contextual characteristic of interpretivism as thick description as a way of offering the context and meaning that individuals place on actions, words and to experiences. These thick descriptions should provide sufficient context for an outside researcher to build meaningful theories of behaviour.

An interpretive approach marries together the aims of the study with my perspective and values while enabling the research questions to be addressed. Underpinned by the assumption that reality is socially constructed, the researcher-participant relationship becomes the vehicle by which this construction is revealed (Andrade, 2009). Throughout this study I have worked closely with the participants to generate meaning, seeking a deeper, richer understanding of the interpretations and reconstructions revealed in participants' data.

4.1.2 Longitudinal approach

The decision to take a longitudinal approach was influenced both by the research questions and methods. A longitudinal approach permits the collection of stories of the past and ongoing present with stories of the present being influenced by past experiences while past experiences influence stories of the present. Our life stories are a current interpretation of our history, and the interpretations and evaluations we give to these are adjusted in light of

current experiences.

The focus of this research is a time of transition in the individual's life, early in their HE career which for many people constitutes a significant period of change. As discussed in Section 3.2.1, the limited work with Apprentices who have progressed into HE (Dismore, 2014a, 2014b, 2016) has only provided a snapshot of the experience which may misjudge the importance of transformation and identity change. A longitudinal approach, therefore, allows for this focus, as well as a consideration of whether the move into HE from an Apprenticeship is a major life change. Collecting data over a longitudinal timescale facilitates the exploration of "the detailed lives of individual young people ... how their life histories, lifestyles and dispositions to learning evolve and change" (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 1999, p.8). Through engaging the same participants over time (in this case 26 months) qualitative longitudinal studies can offer a valuable insight into the changes in participants' lives. Further, analysing the data longitudinally can facilitate an enhanced understanding of participants' meanings (Lawy, 2002) and complements an interpretative approach. Therefore, a longitudinal study gathering data over an extended period of time was necessary to address the aims of this study (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2007).

Longitudinal research can offer a greater opportunity for rapport and building trust by supporting participants to feel more comfortable in the research setting and in the act of reflection (Duncombe and Jessop, 2002). In this way, repeat interviews offer the participant several opportunities to reflect on critical incidents over time and permits both researcher and participant comparisons. Longitudinal research facilitates both forward and backward-looking data collection and analysis (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). In the context of this study, participants could provide retrospective data on the experiences of compulsory education and the pathway to an Apprenticeship while offering an insight into their initial transition to HE. Subsequent interviews allow the participants to reflect on developments and changes in their HE experience while providing insight into how they envision their post-HE lives. One major complicating factor of longitudinal research is that of sample attrition, as ensuring the participants continue to have an interest and willingness to give time to numerous occasions presents more opportunity for withdrawal. There are also challenges of participants moving course, jobs and changing their contact details, meaning that some can be lost through no choice of their own. This highlights the importance of well-planned recruitment, communication and retention which I discuss in Section 5.7.

A final criticism charged of longitudinal research is the 'control effect' (Cohen *et al.*, 2011,

p.270) whereby repeated participation can affect the attitudes and behaviour of participants with understandings and meanings becoming more indebted to questioning. Early work by Bloomer and Hodkinson (1997, 1999) provide a robust example of the use of a longitudinal study of educational transition. This work suggests that longitudinal design can support the analysis process with early interviews helping to identify issues and themes to integrate into subsequent interviews. The ongoing analysis of narratives provides not only new and richer detail but also an authenticity to individual narratives. Bloomer and Hodkinson (1997, 1999) discuss revising their theorising based on incoming data which they argue assists in developing the credibility of analysis allowing the researcher to refine individual stories and theoretical interpretations.

4.2 Qualitative methodology

Placing a biographical narrative approach (Wengraf, 2001) at the centre of this study supports the exploration of the personal experience of Apprentices who have made the transition into, and through, HE with a particular interest in identity as it is constructed over time and within multiple contexts. The focus of analysis is the Apprentice with the longitudinal, narrative interviews being complimented by several case studies (Crompton, 2001) which have drawn on data from in-depth interviews with family, friends, colleagues and/or peers nominated by the Apprentice. This approach has drawn on the work of the Non-Participation in HE Project (see Heath *et al.*, 2008, 2009, 2010; Fuller and Heath, 2010; Fuller *et al.*, 2011) and their conception of 'networks of intimacy' (Heath and Cleaver, 2003) in recognising that to fully understand educational and career decision-making we need to understand the deeply embedded nature and the importance of the first-hand accounts of the wider network members. In this study, I regard the term 'network of influence' to be better reflective of the nature and fluidity of networks in this study, which appear less intimate in terms of the relationship with the Apprentice and more focused on influence and support. While there are some similarities between narratives and case studies such as the depth and richness of data these methodologies have also both been criticised due to the challenge of generalising from findings. Attitudes towards the generalisability of case studies vary (discussed further in Section 4.3), with Stake (1995) making a coherent argument for 'naturalistic' generalisation, Bassey (1999) discusses 'fuzzy generalisations' while Flyvbjerg (2006, p.238) makes the argument for the reader "to discover their own path and truth inside the case". As discussed previously, the thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) these methodologies offer are vital in giving the reader the feeling of being there, experiencing and interpreting alongside the researcher. I

am not intending to suggest the former Apprentices' experiences are common to all who follow similar educational pathways but am searching instead for shared conversations and histories that might link and connect a community of learners. These reactions to the argument of generalisation are compelling and strengthen my belief that case studies can contribute to unique as well as universal understandings (Simons, 1996).

4.2.1 Narrative interviews

The conventional view is that if the interviewer asks questions appropriately, the respondent will give out the desired information, suggesting the interview is purely an instrument for the transmission of knowledge. Alternative perspectives have raised questions about collecting knowledge in this manner (Holstein and Gubrium, 1997) arguing that meaning is socially constituted and that knowledge is created from the actions undertaken to obtain it (Cicourel, 1964, 1974, Garfinkel, 1967). As such, the interview is a social encounter in which knowledge is constructed between participant and researcher rather than being a neutral conduit. In this view, respondents are not the source of knowledge but co-constructors of it (Holstein and Staples, 1992). Instead of controlling our approach, Holstein and Gubrium (1997, p.68) suggest an approach in which we "acknowledge, and capitalize upon, interviewers' and respondents' constitutive contributions to the production of interview data".

Lives and the stories people tell about them have been described in many ways – autobiography, personal history, oral history, life story and narrative with similarities and differences in emphasis (Merrill and West, 2009). Biographical narrative methods enable the reconstruction of situated lived experiences over time (Rosenthal, 2004) giving insight into the individually created meaning and perspectives and the way these change over the life course. Riessman argues that narratives are a basic human way of making sense of the world which illuminates the intersection of biography, history, and society (Riessman, 1993). Through taking a narrative approach in the interviews, I am seeking to focus on individual experiences and common themes, institutional and personal histories, and perspectives on the journey into and through HE. As Laslett (1999, p.392) suggests, personal narratives can illustrate "individual and collective action and meanings, as well as the process by which social life and human relationships are made and changed". Bruner (1986, 1990) and Polkinghorne (1988) further this in their discussions about how telling stories can help the teller to think about and understand their personal thinking, actions and reactions. These aspects of narrative strongly resonate with this study as I want to build a greater understanding from the perspective of the Apprentices themselves. As such, I aimed to create a research space which was less dominated

by me as the researcher and was respectful of the participants' ways of organising meaning in their lives (Devault, 1999).

Biographical methods are designed to encourage the telling of life stories, generating accounts and situations and bringing the subject closer to the actual experience at the time, rather than giving rise to evaluations or post-hoc rationalisations, as is often the case with semi-structured interviews (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). In eliciting stories of past and present experiences, I am aiming for an understanding of how the former Apprentices' experiences have evolved over time. I encouraged participants to tell their own story on their own terms, freely and uninterrupted, enabling them to use their own frame of reference to narrate experiences that they regard as important or relevant. How the participant selects and sequences the telling of events and the way in which these are told, gives insight into how they make sense of their lives and their current construction of identity. The study has been designed in such a way as to produce in-depth insights into the experiences of former Apprentices who are studying in HE to explore and understand their lived experiences from their perspective.

4.2.2 Network of influence case study

The final element of the methodology is arguably a paradigm rather than a methodology, underpinned by epistemological beliefs rooted in the naturalistic research tradition (Gomm and Hammersley, 2000). Case studies often contain a substantial element of narrative - events, the sequence of them, how they are related, the wider issues and who are involved. Flyvbjerg (2011) identifies that frequently in narrative research there is a simplification of data through over-interpretation and compacted stories. Case studies, on the other hand, are more intensive, guided by the wider environment and context, and offer greater depth, richness and completeness than other approaches (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

The study makes use of several individual case studies, where the focus is on an individual Apprentice but with multiple perspectives, in terms of the opinions and perceptions of others. These case studies consider both the voice and perspective of the Apprentice alongside members of their networks of influence including family, friends and peers. Sturman (1999) suggests it is this holistic approach that is critical to the integrity of the case study. The case study can help to recognise that contexts are unique and dynamic, that is might not be possible to document an Apprentice's experiences of their journey, into and through HE without reporting the complex, dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

Taking this approach facilitates three levels of data analysis: individual accounts, relationship-based accounts (the specific interaction between the person and that of another, for example, mother or best friend) and network-based accounts, which may be embedded in the broader network:

networks as linked as they are to varying forms of social, cultural and economic capital, provide a critical context within the individual's thinking about HE is embedded and co-constructed.

(Fuller *et al.*, 2011, p.16)

Educational participation is frequently theorised as a socially embedded practice yet often research is only based on individual accounts. Evidence from inter- and intra-generational social networks, rather than just focusing on the accounts of individuals in isolation, will help provides the context within which individuals' thinking about, and experience of, HE is embedded and co-constructed across the life course.

This approach enables an enhanced understanding of the ways in which participants in different contexts construct their learner biographies, how they make sense of their experiences and perceive themselves as learners over time, and in particular learning and work environments. This is a strength of case studies as they observe an effect in context, recognising that context is a powerful element (Nisbet and Watt, 1984). Case studies can help in understanding complexity, identifying different perspectives and multiple perceptions to clarify meaning. They are particularly useful, as they constitute a triangulated approach (Stake, 2000) shedding light on a range of perspectives that make up particular social worlds. Triangulation in case study research is similar to the navigation used by travellers with the researcher using multiple data points to establish meaning. This involves actively seeking different perspectives to establish interpretation and to reveal alternative meanings.

Commonly, cases are selected for their 'typicality' according to defined characteristics, allowing for the transferability of findings to other contexts and representing analytical rather than statistical generalisation (Burton, 2002). I broadly agree with Stake's (2000) argument for selecting an 'atypical' case if this offers better potential for explaining the particular phenomenon. In choosing the cases for this study, I have sought out the typical and 'atypical'. In sampling for heterogeneity, my aim has been to include a range of views, opinions and experiences. However, I have been bounded by the interest and willingness of the participants for the final phase of the project with my sample being dependent on those participants who

were willing to give me access to their wider social network.

4.2.2.1 Type and partiality of networks

One crucial aspect is defining the kind of network; there are two distinct approaches which have arisen from different historical traditions. The egocentric (personal) network approach (Chua and Wellman (2011); which has grown out of anthropology typically concerned with people rather than groups. An egocentric network comprises starting point individual, the 'ego', who in this study is the Apprentice and the individuals directly linked to the ego, known as the 'alters' (Trotter, 1999). The alters in an egocentric network may be the ego's partner, children, parent, another relative, colleague, friend or similar. Egocentric networks stand in contrast to sociocentric (whole) network approach which has been heavily influenced by the work of Georg Simmel (see Simmel and Levine, 1971) and are based upon all of the links which exist between entities within a predefined and bounded population, such as all employees in a workplace, all members of a social club, or all pupils in a classroom.

My primary concern is with the influences explicitly exerted between the Apprentice and their network, rather than the influences exerted between the members of each network more generally. Through the network interviews, I have collected rich narrative data on both the Apprentice and their network of influence, and have not relied solely upon the Apprentice to provide information about their influences but have drawn data directly from network member interviews. Echoing the work of Heath, Fuller and Johnston (2009), this approach has assisted in identifying relevant network factors in educational and career decision-making, like shared frames of reference and expectations within families. I have gained an insight into the ways in which networks can provide the context for embedded experiences and decision-making and how a network approach provides a stronger foundation for exploring these contexts.

In focusing on personal networks, there are questions about the boundaries and partiality of social networks with the approach having allowed me only partial access to the membership of the Apprentices' networks. Heath, Fuller and Johnston (2009) make a useful distinction between two different levels of influence, the 'achieved network' - those within the networks who were interviewed and the 'shadow network' - consisting of all the network members mentioned and who appear to have exerted some form of influence but who were not interviewed first hand, either because they were not nominated or because they were unwilling to participate. Whilst the first-hand accounts of members of the 'shadow network' have not been directly heard, I have been able to explore (to some extent) the influence of

'shadow network' members through the accounts of the Apprentice and other network members. First-hand accounts are the strength of this approach which has led me to deliberate the significance of the partiality of the network data. While partiality may be a concern, the focus in this study is instead on the "permeable, partial and dynamic" nature of networks (Heath *et al.*, 2009, p.645). Crow (2003, p.8) challenges further the idea that a network can ever be perceived as a clearly defined or static entity, arguing instead that "social networks are configurations of people rather than collectivities with definite boundaries". Antonnuci (1980, 2001) presented the notion that a personal network is a support convoy that alters in shape and texture over time as new individuals join and others exit, whose purpose is to embrace and support the individual through the diverse and multiple experiences of their life. Put simply, individuals are under constant change and development, their situations change, and the interaction between the individual and their situation change as a result. This is a constructive way of conceptualising networks as it highlights the impossibility of capturing a network in its entirety and signals fluidity and dynamism. This is possibly even more apparent in a longitudinal study, whereby influencers and supporters change even over a relatively short period in a participant's life to meet the needs of and be responsive to, the changing requirements of the individual.

4.3 Methods

The study participants have all achieved an Advanced Apprenticeship and subsequently progressed into HE level study, including Bachelor's Degrees, HNC/Ds and FDs⁴⁵. The individuals ranged in age (at the time of the first interview) from 18 to their early 30s. Some had progressed immediately upon completion of their Apprenticeship, others several years post completion and one had begun HE study whilst completing their Apprenticeship⁴⁶. All participants had a connection to the South West of England, having been residents in the South West during their Apprenticeship and/or during their HE study which meant they sat within a broadly similar contextual experience of place as well as time.

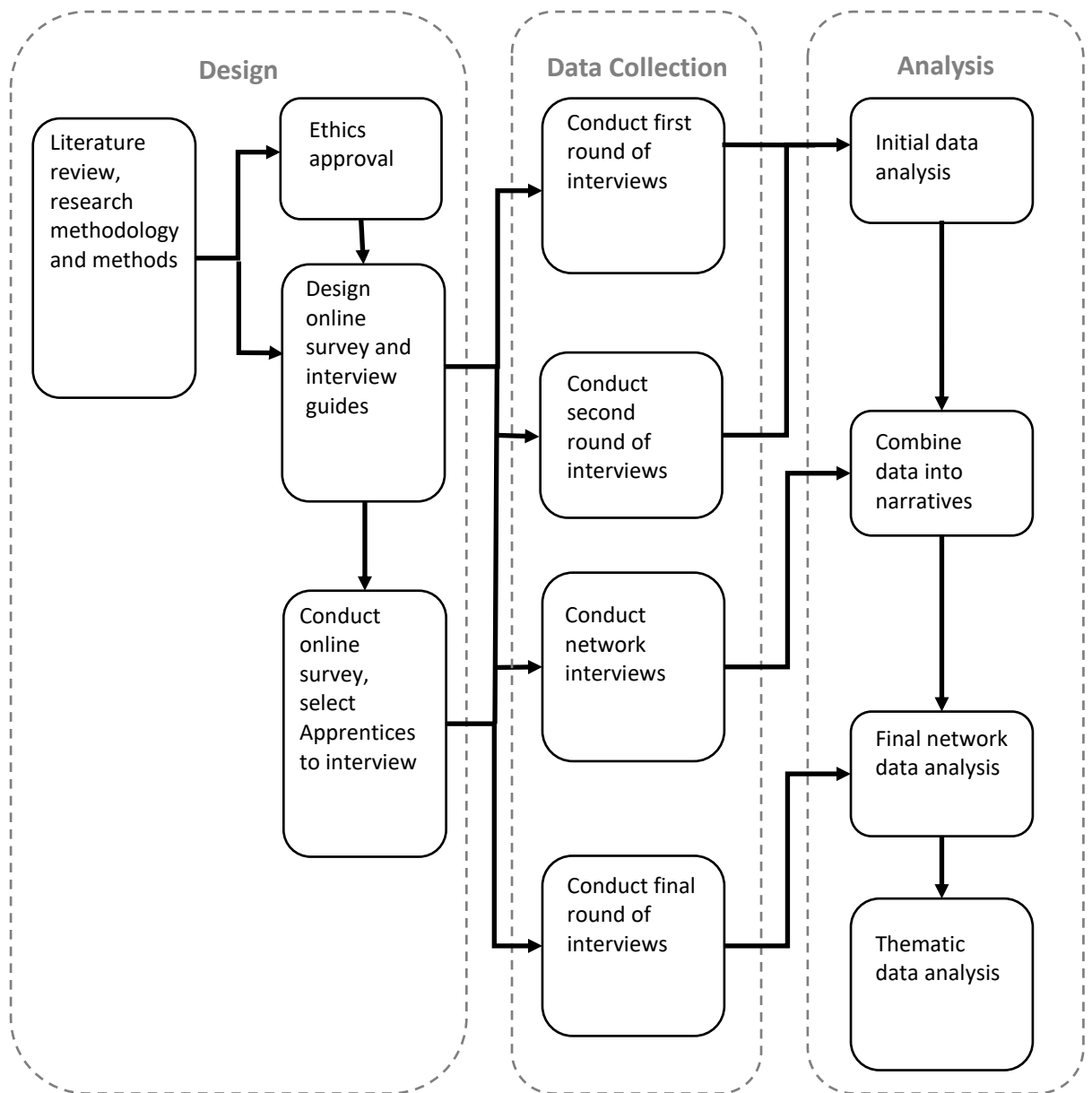
The study was enacted between 2012 and 2017, with the interviews with Apprentices occurring from 2013 to 2015 and the interview with the broader networks taking place during

⁴⁵ I chose to exclude forms of non-prescribed HE which are funded by sources other than HEFCE, such as the SFA. My reasoning for this exclusion was to focus on progression to forms of HE that might be placed on the academic side of the continuum of HE learning in opposition to higher level vocational qualifications.

⁴⁶ All had progressed within five years, the maximum timescale determined for sampling.

2015. There was an interval of between ten to twelve months between each interview session.

Figure 1 The case study research process⁴⁷



4.3.1 Locating a sample

The availability of data on Apprentices and their post-Apprenticeship destinations, particularly those who progress to higher levels of learning, has hindered my ability to gain a representative sample. The methods by which one may traditionally seek to identify students from particular backgrounds within an FE or HE environment do not hold for the identification of those who have completed an Apprenticeship as it is not a qualification but a framework⁴⁸.

⁴⁷ Adapted from Yin (2009, p.57) and used with permission of the publisher.

⁴⁸ See Section 2.1.1 for further information on frameworks.

The Apprenticeship is achieved through obtaining several qualifications, which vary depending on the framework being followed and the training provider. As such, in a HE application, the qualifications would be listed individually rather than being attributed to an Apprenticeship framework. Furthermore, Apprenticeship providers, unlike other post-compulsory education establishments such as Sixth Form Colleges or FE Colleges, do not have to collect nor monitor destination data. As such, few Apprenticeships providers track their achievers or gather data on alumni. Therefore, what remains is a situation whereby the HE providers are almost certainly unaware of who within the student population may have previously achieved an Apprenticeship and training providers are systematically unaware of Apprentices who have progressed to higher level learning.

My professional experience in this field allowed me to capitalise on contacts in HE, FE, training providers, employers, professional bodies and Higher Apprenticeship partnerships to target a potential sample. These gatekeepers played a necessary role in ensuring access to educational providers and potential participants; without this support locating participants would have been extremely difficult. Despite mostly positive responses to my request for involvement in circulating information to potential participants, some gatekeepers (both individual and organisational) felt unable to support this study. Some referred to lacking time, but for others it was due to not knowing of any Apprentices who may have progressed to HE. I also engaged the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) in preliminary discussions to request their involvement in distributing a questionnaire to all Advanced Apprentices who had completed their studies within a three-year timescale in specific geographic areas (for example, Bristol and Bath postcodes). Despite developing a business case and the support of the regional NAS office, I was unable to gain national support as there was a concern regarding the disclosure gained from Apprentices being limited to projects commissioned by NAS or through another government department.

Initial communication with a range of gatekeepers was tailored to the setting as detailed below:

- Apprenticeship providers: I presented information about the study to a range of provider networking activities and sought engagement from providers. I also wrote articles for provider newsletters introducing the study and explaining how providers could support.
- FE: I approached HE departments for help in circulating information through FD and HNC/D programme leaders.
- HE: I approached widening participation departments for help in circulating information

through FD and HNC/D programme leaders. I also contacted several admissions departments. Only one institution could identify students who had entered HE with an Advanced Apprenticeship and circulated an email about the study directly to these students on my behalf. One further institution circulated correspondence to FD and HNC/D programme leaders with variable responses regarding an acknowledgement of Apprentices within their cohorts.

- Employers: I worked with regional large employers and employer bodies and 'progressive' small employers to circulate information to Advanced Apprentice achievers.

Communication was mainly facilitated initially through telephone contact, followed by an email explaining the aim and purpose of the study and a link to an online questionnaire (see Appendix One) that could be circulated directly to potential participants. I sought to ensure that I was clear about my research interests, intentions and the potential outcomes of the work as well as being clear about my expectations for their support. The recruitment strategy and involvement of gatekeepers as discussed above was purposely designed to minimise the power imbalance between the gatekeepers, myself and the participants and to ensure their role was confined to the circulation of an email with a link to the online questionnaire.

4.3.2 Questionnaire

Data gathering commenced with an online questionnaire which had the dual aim of providing me with an insight into the characteristics of the sample population and to allow me to identify students who might be willing to participate in interviews. I distributed a link to a pilot questionnaire⁴⁹ through one training provider and after feedback made some minor amendments to language before wider distribution. The development of the questionnaire took some time; I was aware that this would be distributed on my behalf and therefore the introductory text and questionnaire needed to be clear, easily understandable, concise and self-explanatory (Bryman, 2008). While I gave details of whom to contact for clarification I was aware that participants might choose not to make contact with me and to leave the questionnaire incomplete. Therefore, it was necessary that the questionnaire could be completed quickly and did not appear overly complicated. Web-based questionnaires offer

⁴⁹ Designed using Bristol Online Surveys (BOS) which is a web-based tool that enables the creation, deployment and analysis of online surveys. It is managed by the University of Bristol in collaboration with HEFCE, HE Academy and Vitae. The software minimises the technical knowledge required to produce an online survey, permits personalisation and provides a range of predetermined question formats (for example, list selection, multiple choice, multiple answer and free text). It records completed responses which can be exported into analysis packages therefore minimising data entry related errors and ensures the data can be analysed quickly and accurately.

several advantages over traditional data collection providing more complete data, at a reduced cost and with a faster rate of return (Akl *et al.*, 2005; Truell, Bartlett and Alexander, 2002). However, the most significant benefit was that gatekeepers could distribute the questionnaire directly to the intended participant, without the need to collect and return paper surveys. In addition, the intended participant was free to complete the questionnaire within his or her own time and without the pressure to respond from a gatekeeper.

The questionnaire focused on collecting biographical data including demographic profile, compulsory and post-compulsory education, Apprenticeship completed and HE study. I sent out one reminder email to all colleagues who had offered to help circulate the information to potential participants, however, due to the nature of distribution it is impossible to ascertain the response rate. It is therefore impossible to comment on whether the sample surveyed by the questionnaire is representative of the total population and is better described as a “convenience sample” (Bryman, 2008, p.183).

4.3.3 Achieving a sample

A purposive sampling approach was used to select participants with the features of the population being used as the primary measure for selection. This is a form of non-probability sampling, where participants are not chosen at random and consequently not representative of the population as a whole (Denscombe, 2007). These methods are advantageous under certain conditions, particularly when the research question seeks an in-depth investigation of a small population or when the researcher is performing a preliminary, exploratory study (Schutt, 2011). According to Punch, purposive sampling is “sampling in a deliberate way, with some purpose or function in mind” (2005, p.187). As such, the participants were chosen because of the data they could produce, enabling me to select cases that would serve the purpose of the study. It has also allowed me to recruit a sample with a broad range of characteristics; namely age, gender, Apprenticeship completed, HE programme and mode of study. This strategy is not without its criticisms. Purposive samples can be highly prone to researcher bias. However, I would argue that this subjective component of purpose sampling is only a significant disadvantage when such judgements are not based on clear criteria.

A total of 69 questionnaire responses were received with 38 respondents providing contact details and expressing an interest in participating in the longitudinal study. I aimed to select fifteen⁵⁰ learners with whom to carry out in-depth interviews on their experiences of

⁵⁰ Initially I had aimed for a target of twenty, but subsequently adjusted in light of incorporating a social

progressing to HE as this felt feasible within the timescale⁵¹ and the bounds of the questionnaire responses. I initially removed fourteen respondents for not fulfilling the criteria of being a South West resident and a further two respondents, one of whom had completed their degree course and one to ensure a balance of sectors. I purposely sought to ensure a balanced sample in terms of gender, sector, type of HE programme, mode of study and year of study. From responses, I was interested to note a significant number of respondents had achieved well at school (5 or more GCSEs grades A*-C) and some had also achieved A/AS levels. Anonymised data from the final sample are presented in Appendix Two, with complete vignettes shown in Appendix Three.

Responses to the questionnaire filtered in over a two-month period and sampling was an ongoing process. I began by arranging the first set of interviews with those who appeared in some way unique, for example, studying for a full honours degree or had achieved an unusual Apprenticeship. Interviews with individuals who had followed a more 'traditional' route, for example, engineering and business, I arranged later to ensure these sectors or routes did not overly skew the sample. I contacted all respondents not selected for the interviews offering to keep them informed of the progress of my research while indicating that depending on the direction of the study I might wish to contact them in the future.

Once I had identified a respondent for the interview phase, I contacted them by email to explain the study in greater detail and to ask if they were still willing to be interviewed. I found that three individuals were later unable to participate due to the time commitment and one individual agreed but subsequently had to withdraw due to work commitments. The remaining eighteen all agreed to participate, but only sixteen interviews took place due to timing issues.

4.3.4 Conducting the interviews

The primary data generation method was face-to-face narrative interviews. Having made the participant selections, I contacted each participant by email to check their willingness to take

network approach in the second phase. The original study design was longitudinal study with three interviews over an 18-month period. It became apparent early in the study that I would be unable to recruit a sample of twenty willing participants so I explored other approaches that would complement the narrative methodology. Reading the work of Fuller, Heath and Johnson (2011) I was interested in exploring how the 'network of intimacy' concepts could play out in this study. A decision was taken at this point to engage a smaller group of participants in a case study design that drew on the approach of the work of Fuller and colleagues.

⁵¹ The timescale during this phase of the study was heavily restricted due to my pregnancy and forthcoming maternity leave. I made the practical decision to engage a sample and conduct the first interview prior to the arrival of my first baby in order to ensure the research could be longitudinal and that my pregnancy would have a minimal impact on this work.

part and to negotiate a date, time and venue. The interviews took place in a range of settings, arranged for the convenience of the participant including their home, a quiet café, university/college space or their workplace. Whilst I had less control over these venues and encountered greater potential problems in terms of noise levels and interruptions, I felt the decision to meet at a venue chosen by the participant was worthwhile as it offered some agency in the process. I endeavoured to locate the small recorder in an unobtrusive position in the hope that the participant, whilst obviously aware of being recorded, may be less conscious of it. I decided not to take notes during the interview as I wanted to be able to give the participant my full attention and ensure a conversational process. After each interview, I wrote a short reflection which did not follow a set format but was an outlet for my immediate thoughts.

I have drawn on the narrative interviewing approach outlined by Goodson *et al.* (2010) whereby the first interview invites the participant to tell his or her story, uninterrupted, guided by the question “Can you tell me about your life?”. At the start of the first interview, I explained the general theme of the research but pointed out that, in telling their story they were free to discuss anything which contributed. When the initial narration finished with a coda such as “Well, this is my life so far”, I felt that this gave me permission to elicit further elements of the story. For each phase of interviews, I had prepared a topic guide (see Appendix Four) with the first interview themes being based on education, route to HE, motivation and support, barriers, experience of HE, and after the initial narration these themes were explored. The emphasis was on allowing the participant opportunity to influence the agenda and on listening to, rather than suppressing their story. The content of the longitudinal interviews was influenced by Seidman’s (2013) persuasive case for conducting a series of three interviews with each participant. He suggests that the first interview should focus on the participant’s life history, the second interview should concentrate on aspects of the participant’s present experiences, and the final interview should encourage the participant’s reflection on his or her understanding of those experiences. I followed a similar approach but utilised the second interview to explore ongoing events in the participants’ lives related to the study. The final interview was focused on clarifying aspects of their narrative, asking the participants to reflect on the experience of participating in the study and look forward to their imagined future. The longitudinal approach gave me the opportunity to explore the longer-term view of the change in experiences and its impact on attitudes to learning, identity and sense of self. At the start of the second and final interview, I briefly summarised the previous interview.

I felt it was important is to make the timings clear from the start and suggested to participants that the interview would probably last for approximately an hour and a half, which several authors suggest is the optimum length for a qualitative research interview (Hermanowicz, 2002; Seidman, 2013). This appeared to be helpful as it gave the interviewees a sense of how much detail to provide. The first two phases of interviews ranged in length from fifty minutes to almost two hours yielding transcripts of approximately fifteen to twenty pages of text (or approximately 10,000 to 15,000 words). The final interview was often shorter as it predominantly focused on the participant's reflections and next steps. In terms of the task of analysis, this clearly provides a surfeit of material to examine. I conducted a total of 44 interviews with former Apprentices (Table 5), most of them on three occasions but in the cases of Liam, Nina, Simon and Tom they were all unable to participate in the final interview due to time restrictions on mine or their time⁵².

⁵² I was heavily pregnant with twins during the timescales for the final interview. This caused me challenges in fitting all the Apprentice interviews and network interviews in during the final few months before I took maternity leave. In addition, due to further restrictions on participants availability we struggled to schedule the final interviews. Nina was the only participant who asked not to be included in the final round of interviews but expressed her agreement in the usage of her previous interviews in the study. The final two interviews were scheduled to take place the week prior to the scheduled birth of my twins and the decision was taking not to complete these due to the travel time involved.

Table 5 Profile of Research Participants

Pseudonym	Age⁵³	Ethnic origin	Family HE	Advanced Apprenticeship	HE Qual.	Degree	No. Interviews	Social Network
Claire Lambert	36-45	White British	Parent and sibling	Clinical healthcare support	Bachelor's degree	Children's Nursing	3	No
Elizabeth Morris	18-20	White British	None	Business and Administration	HNC/D	Business and Management	3	No
Gethen Williams	18-20	White British	Parent and sibling	Sporting Excellence	Bachelor's degree	Psychology	3	Yes
India James	18-20	White British	None	Business and Administration	Bachelor's degree	Business Studies	3	No
Jamie Whitefield	21-25	White British	Sibling	Trowel Occupations	Bachelor's degree	Architectural Technology and Design	3	Yes
Liam Smith	26-35	White British	None	Mechanical Engineering	Foundation degree	Mechanical/Manufacturing Engineering	2	No
Lucille Taylor	18-20	White British	Parent	Children and Young People	Bachelor's degree	Educational Studies	3	No

⁵³ At the time of the first interview.

Lucy Dawson	21-25	White British	None	Building Services Engineering	Bachelor's degree	Building Services Engineering	3	Yes
Mo Fakhoury	18-20	Mixed White and Asian	Parent and sibling	Sporting Excellence	Bachelor's degree	Civil and Structural Engineering	3	Yes
Nina Holliday	21-25	White British	Sibling	Business and Administration	Bachelor's degree	Business Management in Practice	2	No
Paul Clark	21-25	White British	Sibling	Mechanical Engineering	Bachelor's degree	Aerospace Engineering	3	No
Rose Poole	21-25	White British	Sibling	Cultural and heritage venue operations	Bachelor's degree	Forensic Science	3	Yes
Samuel Ramchurn	18-20	Mixed Other	None	Business and Administration	Bachelor's degree	Law	3	Yes
Sarah Tomlinson	18-20	White British	Sibling	Sporting Excellence	Bachelor's degree	Sports Therapy	3	No
Simon Forshaw	18-20	White British	None	Cultural and heritage venue operations	Bachelor's degree	History	2	No
Tom Merrin	21-25	White British	None	Electrical engineering	HNC/D	Engineering	2	No

4.3.4.1 Interviews with wider actors

This aspect was introduced to the participants at the end of the second interview allowing participants time to consider whether they would be willing to be involved in this final phase and whom they might approach to take part. This final phase required a process of negotiation with the former Apprentice to identify two or more 'actors' per within their network who have supported or influenced them in their progression to HE. The interviews took place, either face to face or over the telephone, before the final interview with the former Apprentice. I introduced this aspect of the study to all the former Apprentices with the aim of being able to sample several 'cases' with different features and attributes (for example, sector, age, gender, ethnicity) from those who express an interest in participating (final networks outlined in Table 6). Perhaps inevitably given the level of commitment, the selection of the 'cases' has been somewhat opportunistic.

Table 6 Network Participants

Apprentice Pseudonym	Age	Network Members
Gethen Williams	18-20	Mother, HE Tutor
Jamie Whitefield	21-25	Mother, Father, HE Technician
Lucy Dawson	21-25	Mother, Friend
Mo Fakhoury	18-20	Mother, Brother
Rose Poole	21-25	Mother, Apprentice Manager
Samuel Ramchurn	18-20	Father, Manager

These interviews covered three broad aspects. The first, in keeping with the first interview with the former Apprentice, invited the respondent to tell their story drawing on their personal background, educational and career experiences. They were then invited to discuss the extent to which they believe they might have influenced the former Apprentice in their educational and career history and then they were asked to reflect on the impact of HE on the lives and occupational, social and learner identity of the former Apprentice.

4.3.4.2 Maintaining the relationship

Qualitative, longitudinal research presents several challenges that centre upon maintaining the research relationships and both reducing attrition and sustaining engagement having been substantial concerns. While this study has been all-consuming for me as the researcher, for the

participant it touches upon their lives only fleetingly. Aware of this divide I have been eager to maintain a presence in the participants' lives between interviews, whilst wishing to be neither intrusive nor overburdening. To foster long-term engagement, I sustained contact predominantly through a programme of personal emails that I sent at various times to coincide with important dates in the academic year, for example, new terms or assessment periods.

As has been discussed previously, this study is framed by a belief in the co-construction of narrative through the interaction and reciprocity between researcher and participants (Oakley, 1981; Reinhartz, 1983) and as a result of the first narrative interview and contact between interviews, the second interview experience often felt like catching up with an old friend. I found myself excited to meet with the participants a second and third time, genuinely wanting to hear about their lives and how these had changed since we first met. The methodology adopted in this study enabled me to explore the participants' past, present and anticipated futures, what Abbs (1974, cited in Powell, 1985) refers to as 'the three temporal phases of life'. During interviews, I was happy to tell participants something about my life, for example, where we had shared tastes, interests or experiences⁵⁴. Partly, I found myself doing this to encourage participants to talk frankly about their lives, but partly to ease my own guilt at knowing so much about their lives. Over time, familiarity was fostered which helped to establish and maintain a level of trust and rapport necessary for the participant to 'open-up' and discuss their lives. However, as I discuss in Section 5.7, this approach presents ethical concerns over exploiting the participants' goodwill through 'doing rapport' and 'faking friendship' (Duncombe and Jessop, 2002).

4.4 Methodological criticisms and concerns

There is an inherent danger in judging qualitative research through a positivist lens. Positivists might criticise narratives and case studies as subjective accounts with issues relating to representativeness, reliability, validity and generalisability and while these are concerns for all research they are particularly pertinent to this type of study. The belief that qualitative

⁵⁴ Returning to the study and conducting the second interview after a period of maternity leave led me to reflect on what impact this experience has had on the participant-research relationship. My pregnancy and arrival of my first son was a life-changing event, yet what I had not considered was how this had given my participants some inner knowledge about my life. During the second interviews, I became much more aware of how my impending motherhood during the first interview encounter would then influence subsequent discussions. All the participants, whether male, female, young or mature and asked questions about my life – my son, the challenge of new motherhood, balancing studying and life commitments. I have found myself reflecting on how the change in my own circumstances may have impacted on the framing of some of our discussions, particularly about future hopes and plans.

research can be evaluated using the same criteria for evaluating of quantitative research is contentious (Straus and Corbin, 1990; Webb, 1992; Sandelowski, 1993). The focus of interpretive research is on collecting depth and richness of data acknowledging the importance of context, yet this opens the potential for subjectivity in interpretation, meaning that one cannot confidently generalise beyond the participants and context studied (Hatch, 2002). However, Riessman (1993) argues applying traditionally positivist criteria such as validity, objectivity and reliability of qualitative research creates the impression that such studies are not academically rigorous. Instead, the criteria should be based on the authenticity, accuracy and credibility of the interpretation rather than the ability to extrapolate to different contexts (Lincoln, 1995). While the research approach may not stand to represent whole populations, it has sought instead to give voice and insight to the experience of a subgroup missing from other studies – Apprentices who progress to HE study. As discussed earlier, case studies are valuable because of their explanatory power (Crompton, 2001) and can represent other cases with similar characteristics (Burton, 2002). While the sample was slightly more opportunistic than I had envisaged, the diversity in the backgrounds and experiences may be viewed as representative of other individuals who have followed similar pathways. The aim of the case studies is to make analytical, not statistical generalisations, to gain insight into the complexity of processes and to identify and explain patterns - for example, the role of occupational identity in scaffolding becoming a student. Several authors have argued that the legitimacy of case studies does not rest with typicality but in the dynamics of the research relationships. Bassey's (1999) 'fuzzy generalisations' are a qualified generalisation which he perceives as fitting the field of educational research and the complexity of personal and biographical research. Stake (1995) makes an argument for more intuitive, empirically grounded 'naturalistic' generalisation appreciating that robust representations stimulate the readers deeper understanding, allowing them to generalise from the case. While Flyvbjerg (2006, p.238) makes the argument for the reader "to discover their own path and truth inside the case". My role as a researcher to present plausible, authentic accounts that enable the reader to make connections to their own experiences. The case studies do not seek to confirm the validity of the Apprentice narratives or to triangulate accounts across the network. Instead, the narratives generated by network members are intended to sit alongside others in the network to give a greater insight into relationships and influences.

Narratives are inevitably 'partial truths', based on particular interactions and informed by the frames of reference of the researcher (Clifford, 1986), as such, different researchers may arrive at different descriptions. This is not due to a low validity but because of the richness and depth

offered which could be interpreted in a variety of ways (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber, 1998). Narrative methods typically fall “outside the limits of what had conventionally been thought to be accessible to validation” (Polkinghorne, 2007, p.484). Instead, Polkinghorne suggests that the reader should make the judgment about the worthiness of knowledge. I have paid attention to the dense, rich ambiguity and detail of narratives to ensure they are not conflated or reduced to neat summaries that iron out the complexities and contradictions of real life. Stake's (2000) concept of naturalistic generalisation emphasises the power of rich descriptions of the particular, providing the reader with vicarious experience by which they can recognise patterns and issues in other contexts.

4.5 Approaching data analysis

Waller (2010) discusses how he draws on Whitty's (2002) calls for educational researchers to take a vulture's eye view. A vulture's lens enables it to keep the background landscape in view while also focusing on its object of immediate interest. Drawing on this metaphor helps illuminate how ‘network of influence’ norms and values have influenced the Apprentices’ decision-making. Whitty drew on C. Wright Mills (1959) notion of ‘the sociological imagination’ which involves developing a deeper understanding of the intersection between biography and history, between identity and structure, and between personal troubles and public issues. This recognises the need for multiple foci during the research process, different lenses by which to explore various elements of social reality. The narratives I present have multiple possible interpretations depending on the lenses that are applied, my original drafts of the network narratives became highly theorised during the analysis and I risked “rendering the complexity of the lives of (my) subjects less and less visible” (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996, p.158). Rewriting these narratives, I have attempted to draw out themes and comparisons while retaining a consciousness that these are elements of a life story. Given that much of the interview data was unstructured, the challenge was to identify meaningful themes and concepts that cut across cases without losing the sense of the whole (Wengraf, 2001)

4.5.1 The Apprentice as the unit of analysis

In this study, I have subscribed to the notion that a case study is not so much a methodology, but a research strategy encompassing the methods that have helped me study the Apprentice ‘networks of influence’. Each network is, therefore, a case involving two initial interviews with the former Apprentice, interviews with members of their ‘networks of influence’ and a further final interview with the Apprentice. Worthy of note is the decision I have taken over the

timings of interviews. Initially, I had considered completing all three Apprentice interviews prior to carrying out the network interviews but subsequently decided to conduct the final Apprentice interview after the network interview. I have made this decision for two reasons; firstly, so I could approach the final interview with a better sense of the values, viewpoints and experiences of the wider network members and secondly, as a way of closing the research relationship. As I have discussed previously, I felt a sense of obligation to the former Apprentices due to their generosity of time and data and meeting them again after the network interviews felt like an appropriate and satisfactory end to the relationship. My theoretical approach has used the Apprentice, rather than the social network, as the unit of analysis enabling me to investigate individual accounts of decision-making, alongside affording the exploration of relationship-based accounts (for example, parent-child interactions) and wider network-based accounts, which may be embedded in the network as a whole or within specific parts of the network (for example, existence of shared attitudes and dispositions in relation to education and learning). This has generated evidence relating to the choices that are considered normal within particular networks – that is, among ‘people like us’ – linked to shared expectations relating to employment options and the existence of network ‘dynasties’ based on specific occupations, for example, engineering and seafaring.

Placing the Apprentice at the centre of the study has facilitated the analysis of the individual Apprentice narratives (those not included as cases) alongside the network Apprentice narratives. The network-based analysis augments the individual Apprentice’s narratives through offering a lens for exploring decision-making as it is socially situated, embedded and co-constructed within ‘networks of influence’ that consist of family, friends and work colleagues. The analysis of network accounts has provided a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of decision-making and choice, adding an additional layer of understanding.

4.5.2 The analysis process

The process of data analysis started during the data collection phase, fully transcribing the audio recordings shortly after the interviews. I fully transcribed the first two interviews in order for closeness to the data and to gain a rich understanding of the social worlds of the chosen participants. Whilst the transcription process was very time consuming; it was a valuable approach to take during the early stages. My approach to the final Apprentice and network interviews was to listen to each recording at least twice and type an abridged transcript. Two distinct yet complementary approaches formed the data analysis, the first stage focused on the Apprentice cases (those who participated in the network phase), re-

writing their narratives and interweaving the network-based analysis. The second stage was a thematic approach of looking across the individual interviews accounts.

4.5.2.1 Network analysis

The narrative focus of the cases reinforces the notion of temporality: a sequence of actions over time that divides narrative analysis from other types (Riessman, 2008). The purpose of narrative-based analysis is therefore to expose the overarching 'topics' or 'plots' that develop within the storied form over time (Webster and Mertova, 2007) and in doing so becomes a way of analysing individual lived experiences to discover narrative linkages (Gubrium and Holstein, 2009). Within this study, the narrative data analysis was an ongoing process throughout the two years of data collection with preliminary analysis, in terms of early defining and categorising the narrative plots after the first two interviews with participants. Riessman (2008) emphasises the need for close reading, as such I read and re-read each interview transcript with attention to both detail and language. The ongoing analytical process of the networks was guided by the underlying principle that the analysis should maintain each participant's story as narratively coherent accounts (Squire *et al.*, 2014), rather than fragmented into common themes. My aim for the network cases has been to capture 'the whole story' for each former Apprentice across a temporal dimension with the final stories grounded in time, place and context. The narratives were communicated lives, and my goal was to ensure that I linked past, present and future to assemble the participants' stories as meaningful accounts (Gubrium, 1993).

I have deliberated on how I could best present the data generated from the network interviews. I acknowledge that I have inevitably influenced the narratives as the interviews have been a collaboration between me as interviewer and the participant as storytellers with the stories having been shaped by the interview environment and context. I have sought to present the Apprentices' narratives as engaging productions and have attempted to weave in the network voices where these add insight into the experience but balance these interruptions to ensure primacy is always given to the Apprentices' voices and their first-hand experiences. The need to interpret multiple accounts within any one network has presented a significant challenge, prominent because accounts may be potentially conflicting or at least told from different perspectives. Furthermore, interviewing and interacting with several individuals within a single network may lead to them responding to their perceptions of how 'the story' has been told by other members of the network. The potential for conflict in accounts raises questions relating to the ontological status attached to the interview data and

the analytical sense of the data.

4.5.2.2 Thematic analysis

Once the five case studies had been constructed, I used these as a starting point for the thematic analysis of all of the former Apprentice interviews. Although the drafted research questions would have made a suitable basis to begin the analysis, I decided to take a more inductive approach to ensure that the findings were not overly determined by pre-conceptions of what sort of data would be relevant to each question. Instead, I wanted to see what emerged from the data and to compare these findings to the research questions. Rather than associate myself with a particular analytical approach, I drew on Wellington's (2015) broad outline of qualitative thematic analysis - immersing oneself in the data, reflecting and standing back, taking apart and analysing data, recombining and synthesising data, relating and locating one's data, reflecting back and presenting the data, which portrays, in a somewhat more methodical manner than I experienced, the stages of my analytical process. Throughout this process, I immersed myself in the data by re-reading the participants' accounts and ensuring a rigorous process of drawing conclusions which involved being sensitive to the context surrounding the generation of data. I sought to be reflexive, examining my own analysis for researcher bias, but would not claim that this has been entirely avoided in part due to being sceptical that the coding arose out of the data without any influence from the literature in which I had been immersed but also because reality is always constructed and the themes that emerge do so through my interaction with the data (Bryman, 2008). My reluctance to claim objectivity is, I believe, no more than any reflexive researcher should acknowledge.

I loaded all the interview transcripts electronically into Nvivo⁵⁵ for coding. I was aware that relying solely on computer-based coding can cause the data to be viewed in a piecemeal fashion, but confident in my familiarity with the interviews and the prior construction of the network narratives mitigates these concerns and has allowed me to work with the significant amount of detailed interview data more efficiently. However, in a longitudinal study such as this, there are several different ways of examining the data: for example, by year, theme, subject or HE provider; in practice, I explored several approaches. It was not until I commenced the writing up stage that I focused on the former Apprentices' learning careers around the notions of being and becoming. Once I had analysed the data in this way, I 'zoomed out' to the broader transcript to confirm my analysis was appropriate to the context. Walford

⁵⁵ Nvivo was chosen due to my prior experience with the programme and because it was a software package available within the university.

(2001) reminds us that quotes can be taken out of context and their meanings changed, and so adopting this method of locating quotes in the broader context helped me to check their meaning.

4.6 Ethical issues

There is a vast array of ethical considerations in any research design, many are interrelated and contribute to the maintenance and moderation of the power relationship between researcher and participant. I have been clear in discussing with participants my aspiration for collaboration rather than a study that is 'done' to them with little or no payback. For these reasons, I made every effort to ensure 'informed consent', as far as it is possible, and to acknowledge and attempt to balance the relationship power differentials. One minor way was requesting participants chose the pseudonym by which they would like to be known, keen to encourage their 'ownership'. However, my presence in the research relationship cannot be avoided, and in fact is central to it (Stanley and Wise, 1993). My role in the (re)construction of narratives means I have consciously reflected on my own assumptions and values. I applied for ethical approval early in the study but revisited my own assumptions and principles throughout its duration. My belief is that ethics cannot, and should not, be approved and then forgotten it is a central consideration that must be continually reviewed. This study and my role within it has been guided by respect, tolerance and care towards my participants and the knowledge they have afforded me (Wellington, 2015). I have deliberated throughout the data collection, analysis and writing up about ensuring I befittingly represented my participants' experiences. I have felt the need to justify, even if to myself, the decisions I have made and whether I feel my participants would agree with these. I personally believe that questioning myself throughout the research process and acting reflexively has helped to ensure not only adherence to ethical guidelines but also to broader moral beliefs.

I adhered to the six criteria in the British Educational Research Association (2011) Guidelines for Ethical Research: Voluntary Informed Consent, Openness and Disclosure, Right to Withdraw, Detriment Arising from Participation in Research, Privacy and Disclosure. I have also been aware of my ethical obligation to produce an accurate and high-quality study guided by the suggestion that "poor research leading to indefinite answers tends to be unethical in nature" (Gorard and Taylor, 2004, p.172), since research that does not lead to "a safe and believable conclusion" is of no use to anyone.

4.6.1 Voluntary informed consent

I sought to ensure that the consent of the participants was as 'voluntary' and 'informed' as possible by discussing the aims of the research study, explaining in detail each stage and the way I foresaw their narrative accounts being represented. Before every interview, I gained permission to record the interviews and reminded participants of the ethical guidelines to which I had agreed to adhere. I adopted procedures to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, as far as practically possible in the circumstances and gave participants assurance of their right to withdraw. I discussed with participants the issue of withdrawal, and we agreed that the final point for withdrawal was within four weeks of the final interview due to the challenge of extracting data after analysis had taken place. I gave assurances regarding the storage of data and recordings and who would hear them. I emailed participants a copy of the consent form (see Appendix Five) and Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix Six) which I then gave in hard copy. The Participant Information Sheet incorporated the study's key ethical principles and explained what participation would involve and why the participant had been selected. It outlined the right to withdraw at any stage without explanation and that they could refuse to answer any question. It also gave appropriate contact details should the participant have any questions or concerns. At the end of the first interview, I requested a signed copy of the consent form but was mindful that consent should be ongoing (Miller and Bell, 2002) which is pertinent to this study as the focus and design have evolved over time. As such, I verbally sought consent at each interview to ensure the participant was willing to participate but did not get frustrated with repeated requests for signing forms (Lawton, 2001). The longitudinal design offered several exit points helping preserve the voluntary nature of participation. Longitudinal research offers additional reassurance that "interviewees are not totally powerless, and that they can withhold their participation" (Duncombe and Jessop, 2002, p.121). Only one participant chose to withdraw from the final interview but agreed to her data remaining in the study.

4.6.2 Confidentially and anonymity

Anonymity is a question of degree. The problem is that in re-telling or representing narratives, individuals can become identifiable, especially when they have spent time in groups where they may have revealed some of the same stories and details now being told. I was aware that some of my participants knew each other. Two of my participants were in a relationship at the start of the study, which had broken down before the second interview. This presented a challenge, despite changing information about these participants, I have struggled with the

difficulty in anonymising sufficiently to ensure that one individual would not recognise the other within the final publication. I discussed with the participants the challenge of being able to guarantee complete anonymity due to the distinctiveness of their experience. To try and ensure complete anonymity would require not just changing critical aspects of the participants' lives, such as marital status, ethnicity, family background, but re-writing their stories so that they were anodyne and lost the person (Howe and Moses, 1999). Instead, critical information has been changed – educational institutions attended, employers, towns and cities and names of family members. This is particularly important due to presenting several narratives from a single network which could expose not only the individual but others from within the network.

Confidentiality was maintained by using a participant pseudonym, which was known only to myself and the participant, on recordings and transcripts and storing this data on a password-protected computer. The need for confidentiality is more important when members of the same family are to be interviewed (Punch, 2007). I have assured my participants that their interviews are confidential and that I would not share their discussions with other network members. Confidentiality and anonymity must be assured, and within the parameters of the study, I have made every effort to achieve this.

4.6.3 The researcher-participant power relationship

The final ethical dilemma explored is the potential for researchers to abuse their power in the development of rapport with participants. Concern regarding the power imbalance between the researcher and participant in conventional forms of interviewing has been raised by feminist academics (Oakley, 1981). Narrative research requires a respectful relationship between the researcher and participant, one that is intimate and inquiring but not voyeuristic. The interaction provides the researcher with the power of knowledge about the participant that raises ethical issues such as who has the right to 'seduce' stories out of people and why they think they have that right. Duncombe and Jessop (2002, p.107) summarise:

Uncomfortably, we came to realize that even feminist interviewing could sometimes be viewed as a kind of job where, at the heart of our outwardly friendly interviews, lay the instrumental purpose of persuading interviewees to provide us with data for our research, and also (hopefully) for our future careers.

Their article makes for uneasy reading in raising some important ethical and methodological issues. A researcher must manage the moral aspect of an honest, open research relationship

which has clear boundaries, but at the same time, there is a necessity to build a rapport which is conducive to the generation of worthwhile, sometimes very personal, data. Many of the techniques explained as a kind of 'how to do an interview' I adopted, such as: turning up in casual attire, maintaining eye contact, taking a friendly tone, and using reassuring smiles and gestures. Along with some of the 'commodified' techniques they describe, I also used some of my own: I admired pet rabbits though I am allergic, accepted cups of coffee I did not always want and noted children's, sibling's and partner's names to ask about in subsequent interviews. While this was done in the hope that I would develop a friendly relationship, they might be considered hallmarks of 'faking friendship'. One could also argue that these are traits of politeness and common decency, taking an interest in those you might meet, even though those meetings might be infrequent. Duncombe and Jessop (2002) reflect that interviews move along a spectrum between 'genuine rapport' and 'faking friendship'. I would suggest that all personal relations move along a similar spectrum, where we develop a general rapport with some and fake friendly, or more accurately, friendliness with others. The potential to exploit this situation is present in research just as it is present in our everyday lives. As with the other dilemmas discussed, I cannot deny their existence nor claim to be able to overcome these. All I can do is be reflexive to the dilemmas, such as the danger of 'harm' that can befall those who are researched and who end up divulging more than they would have liked. As an experienced interviewer in a variety of contexts, I am aware that:

The skills of interviewing built up over a number of years gives researcher an edge. The respondents may find themselves manipulated into saying more than they intended.

(Ball, 1991 cited in Griffiths, 1998, p.41)

I have sought to reflect on interview discussion and how the participant might feel after discussing their story. During my second interview with Rose, I was struck by how adrift she appeared compared to our first interview where she appeared full of drive and determination to carve a successful career and found myself reflecting on how she might feel after her disclosures. Talking about one's life is an emotional experience, and the researcher needs to be aware that the telling may cause hurt or harm "people's lives may be affected by being researched" (Hammersley, 1995, p.112). I did not want to betray their trust by encouraging participants to reveal more than they might wish (Duncombe and Jessop, 2002). I was not seeking to 'do rapport' by over-displaying empathy and sincerity but pursued a path between stripping "the surface of conscious experiences" and mining "unconscious layers" (Kvale, 1992

p.3).

The issue of power is evident in why some of the participants chose to tell me their stories and told them in particular ways. They might have told them differently in another time or place to another researcher as “characteristics such as age, sex, social class and religion have proven to have an impact” (Fielding, 2001, p.134) as does appearance (Delamont, 2002) and ethnicity, social status and education (O’Leary, 2010). I have tried to address my concerns about the power differential through the narrative approach; enabling the interviewee to sequence and tell 'their story' in their way, according to their own meanings and priorities, without a strict frame of reference. In reconstructing the participants’ narratives, I have drawn on my own contextual knowledge and sought to theorise several possible interpretations. Nonetheless, there is a continued challenge of presenting the participants’ ‘voice’ and how I portray their stories. I have struggled with balancing the participants’ narration with my interventions of analysis and theory. There are always 'strategies of power' when entrusted with 'lives' that you are able to shape, edit and even manipulate. As researchers, we bring origin, location and intellectual bias, but the reflexive researcher should also bring with them responsibility and a desire to extend knowledge. Simply by choosing to publish one participant's story over another involves some form of bias or categorisation in deciding which narrative makes it into the public arena. This is undeniably a 'strategy of power' from which there is no escape. It is my role to convert a life story into a life history by analysis, adding context and utilising theory yet at the same time, I have a responsibility to attempt to convey the 'intended meaning' (Atkinson, 1998).

Chapter 5. Re-storying Apprentice biographies and the influence of social networks

This chapter is the first of two presenting the analysis of data and findings; this chapter provides a detailed description of five participant biographies drawing in wider network voices to contextualise biographical and learning experiences. I have sought to reconstruct the biographies of former Apprentices who progress into HE, in order to understand the meaning they afford to their experiences in the context of their lives. The aim of this chapter is to present these as coherent case study narratives which focus on the participants' decision making, their lived experiences and the role and influence of the networks within their lives and in doing so set the context for the following two thematic analysis chapters. The voices of the networks are interwoven into the reconstructions while giving primacy to the voice of the former Apprentice. Despite heterogeneous narratives, there are similarities and differences in the contexts and the participant's perceptions and understandings of their learning journey. I focus here on just five network cases which have not been selected as ideal types nor necessarily typical of the wider sample. In some important respects, they are quite untypical. The themes around which the narratives are constructed have come directly from the data analysis, being prominent in the accounts of others and additionally reflect my experiences of working with people on VET courses. Yet, they are vivid reconstructions, wherever possible using the participants' own words, and are included in this thesis to assist the illumination of learning experiences, changing network relationships and transformations in identity that I found were shared in some way by others who participated in this study.

As discussed in Section 5.3, several factors influenced the selection of the network case studies. I was reliant on the participants being willing to be the gateway with ten participants initially expressing an interest. In narrowing down the networks, I sought to provide an in-depth analysis of the case studies that would illuminate the breadth of educational experiences, the communities they engaged in, and their transitions into and through HE as these were recurring themes in the first two participant interviews. I did not want to give focus to only the extremes, but I also did not want to ignore some of these individual accounts. In selecting which participants to engage, I sought balance regarding demographics (such as age, gender, ethnicity, social class and disability), mode of HE study and 'type' of network member, for example, family, friend, managers and HE tutors. To elucidate on my decision, three of the participants (Sarah, Mo and Gethen) who volunteered for the network element had achieved similar Apprenticeships, came from similar middle-class backgrounds and were all studying HE full-time. Sarah and Gethen had also combined A Level study with their Apprenticeship while

Gethen and Mo were both studying in research-intensive HE institutions. I decided to approach Gethen and Mo, partly because they were the only two participants studying in elite institutions but also because Mo's route had been facilitated by the Foundation Year and Gethen had nominated a HE tutor as one of his network members. I chose not to pursue Lucille's network as it consisted only of one person; Elizabeth, as her network was formed exclusively of family and there were similarities between the narratives of Samuel and Lucy; and, Katherine whose account drew similarities with Rose. However, there was a personal aspect to declining Katherine's offer - she had spoken at length about the negative impact that studying had had on her family and marital relationship. While one might assume that as she had nominated her husband for the network interview, the relationship has improved yet I felt it was too prying, too intrusive to pursue.

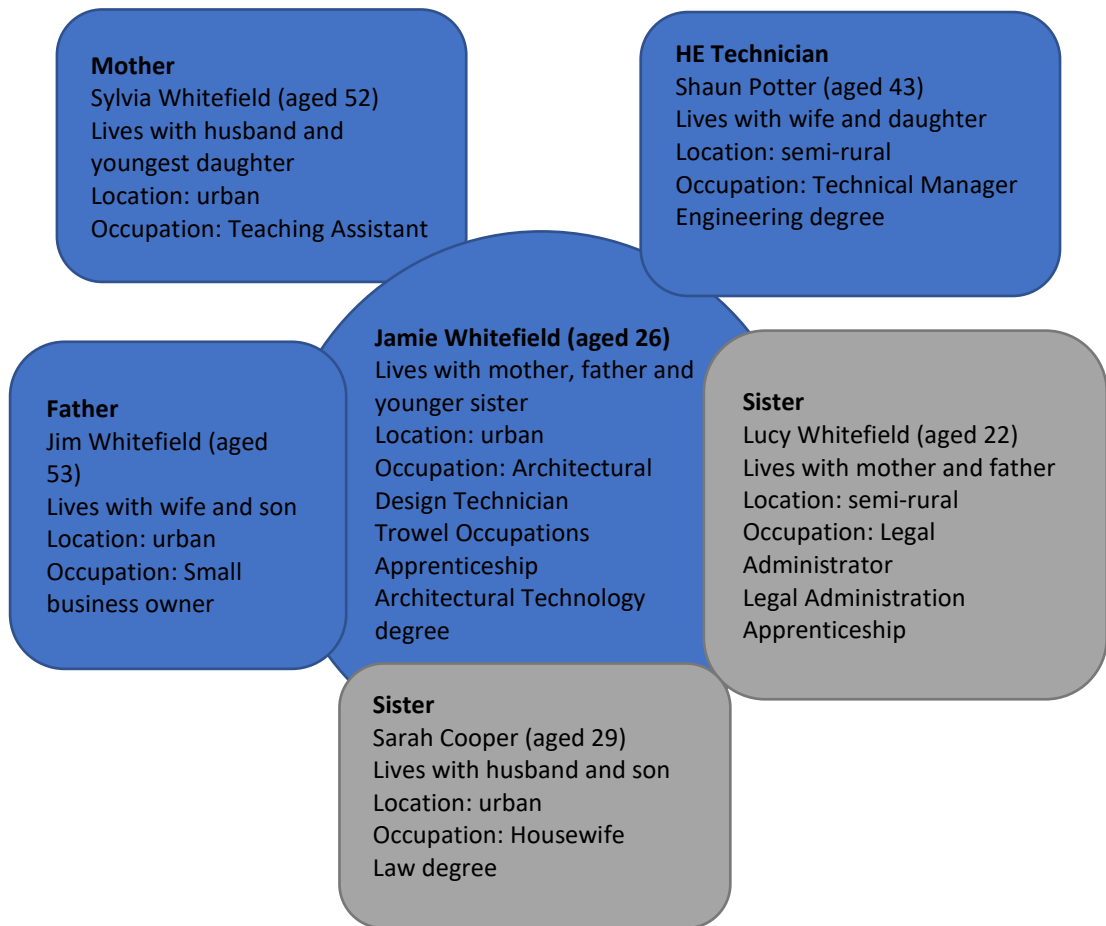
After these deliberations, the networks of Mo, Samuel, Lucy, Jamie, Gethen and Rose were selected. However, I omit Gethen from this thesis both for reasons of space and repetition. The vignettes include a summary account of the network, a brief description of its members and their biographies alongside an in-depth analysis of the Apprentice, their choices and experiences and the impact on learner identity. The case studies reflect a different pattern of educational biographies to many traditional HE entrants and expose how individual's construct both an occupational and learner identity through work, Apprenticeship, and HE.

The individuals in the networks were nominated by the former Apprentices as people they are close to, and who are influential in their educational and career decision-making, as such they are close-knit. The case studies, consist of at least two different levels of influence (Heath, Fuller and Johnston, 2009), based on the influence of members of both the 'achieved network' and the 'shadow network'. The achieved network are those directly interviewed, while the shadow network consists of network members who exert influence but were not interviewed, either because they were not nominated or because they were unwilling to participate. The Figures presented in this chapter provide details of the achieved (dark blue boxes) and shadow networks (light grey boxes), recognising that support and influence are not only present in the relations of the obtained sample but also with broader network members. To some extent, I have been able to explore the influence of shadow network members through the interviews with the former Apprentice, but have not been party to first-hand accounts from these individuals, even though such accounts have underpinned this approach.

5.1 Jamie Whitefield

The Whitefield network (see Figure 2) has an achieved sample of four members; Jamie, his mother, his father and a HE technician. There are three other people who Jamie discusses in his interviews, his sisters and his Apprentice employer. Sarah and Lucy were not nominated for interviews, Steve was nominated but did not respond to requests. Jamie's journey to HE was protracted. He experienced periods of unemployment, low waged, low skilled work, and fragmented post-compulsory transitions before commencing a Bricklaying Apprenticeship at age 18. He then utilised his experience and Apprenticeship qualifications to progress into an Architectural Technician degree at a modern university.

Figure 2 Jamie Whitfield's Network



Jamie's older sister is the only member of the network to have been to university. His mother attended a grammar school, studied for A Levels, qualified and worked as a nurse until her children were born. She then stayed at home with her children before becoming a teaching assistant. Jamie's father attended a technical school before following an electrical apprenticeship. After many years in the building trade, Jamie's father set up his own sole

trading inventory business. Permeating the network interviews were shared values of a robust work ethic and instrumental reasons for education participation - as a means to enter the workforce at a skilled level. Learning is not a visible feature in the family's biography, although Jamie's mother has taken several short work-related courses and expressed in the interview an interest in studying for a degree having seen the impact on her children.

Jamie attended a single-sex comprehensive school and despite his ability became discouraged due to not achieving as well as his peers and a lack of understanding of the role of education:

[I] missed the whole focus thing, I didn't really understand school as a tool to equip me for my future; I just thought it was something to piss me off.

(Jamie, first interview)

Lacking a sense of belonging to the school community Jamie formed a friendship with a group of boys who shared an allegiance in enjoying their youth. While Jamie went on to achieve several good GCSE grades, he had limited engagement with his future and withdrew from post-compulsory education. His transition to employment and adulthood was difficult; he found himself unemployed and perceived as a troublemaker. Jamie's father then presented an ultimatum that Jamie had to find work or move out. Jamie discovered Apprenticeships through the careers service and thought a trade would be "good pay [and] relatively quick to learn." The Apprenticeship and the learning environment fitting with his masculine identity: "it was not academic based. We had fag breaks every five minutes. We had fights out in the car park." However, Jamie felt exploited, working for little money but recognised that this was a journey to full being fully skilled and competent:

I started on £50 a week and they just worked the life and soul out of you, got their money's worth and then after a while the older guys would give you the tools and say, "look it's your time now".

(Jamie, first interview)

A turning point was securing a placement with an artisan builder whose owner became a mentor, providing support and encouragement for Jamie to take ownership of his work. The placement led to permanent employment and the experience played a significant role in the formation of Jamie's occupational identity. He developed a sense of pride in his abilities as a craftsman and became respected by his colleagues for his finesse and attitude to work. These qualities were recognised and Jamie was given responsibility for managing projects. Having

experienced a discontinuous biography in his initial transition, the Apprenticeship and his subsequent employment fulfilled a critical function in restoring his confidence in his learning and broader abilities, and in securing his occupational identity.

While Jamie's network is mostly absent from accounts of his early decision-making, it is highly influential in the decision to progress to HE. Several separate, but interlinked, experiences over a short period challenged Jamie to consider his possible future and rethink his life course:

He [business owner] said, "is bricklaying all you want to do?" I don't know that made me think. He said, "do you want to do something better?" and I said "yes", I said, "I haven't got A Levels I've only got GCSEs, and I can't go to uni with GCSEs".

(Jamie, first interview)

After the planting of this seed and frustrated with his working conditions, Jamie contemplated a different possible self:

Some days it would be a rainy day, and you'd be in a trench, covered in mud and laying soggy concrete blocks and I would just think. When two people would walk past the site in their suit or whatever and I would just imagine myself in another life, you know.

(Jamie, first interview)

The physical demands of the job took their toll and after a period of illness, Jamie describes labouring in horrendous weather conditions further fuelling his desire to leave the building site. Returning home, Jamie was frustrated at being constrained by his perceived lack of qualifications but his older sister suggested HE was an opportunity for change:

She [sister] went to uni, and she's a very academically minded person, and she said, "why don't you go to uni?", and I said, "oh, I can't go to uni". She'd obviously been to uni and knew the info, and she said: "you can go; there are ways" (Jamie, first interview).

Trusting his sister's opinion and fuelled by his mentor's encouragement, Jamie contacted admissions at his local research-intensive institution to be told he did not meet the admissions' criteria. Jamie fortuitously then worked on a project at a university, with the insight into campus life reinforcing his newfound aspiration. He then found a university that was willing to consider his application:

So, I rang [a local post-1992 institution], and I said, “look I’ve got no A Levels”, and the woman on the phone said, “we consider every application”. She said, “by all means apply, but I can’t guarantee you’d make it through because you haven’t got the requirements”.

(Jamie, first interview)

Jamie demonstrated a clear sense of agency in planning his progression to HE and was offered an unconditional place which “was a turning point.” Jamie’s motivation to enter HE stemmed from a firm belief that a degree would help him create a possible self with greater job security, earning potential and better employment conditions.

Despite studying locally, Jamie anticipated a conflict with his friends and decided to live on campus and quickly integrated himself into the student community. He gravitated towards young men he recognised as being like him, confident, outgoing but sometimes perceived as troublemakers. He first encountered Shaun, a course technician, was in a studio class where Jamie appeared to be falling into being one of the “likely lads”. Yet during his first year, Jamie began to understand the HE expectations and impresses Shaun not just with his industry knowledge but his diligence and hard work:

[Jamie] just worked, he never stopped working. He knew that this was his big shot at getting out of, you know, climbing the social strata, not being that guy anymore.

(Shaun, HE Technician)

Shaun was drawn to wanting to help Jamie reach his potential and offered to be an informal mentor.

Jamie’s occupational identity contributes to his perception of learning and his developing student identity. He enjoys studying with a diverse student group, but his experience is different from common perceptions of the mature student experiences. He is confident, his descriptions of learning are enthusiastic, he is an active participant and develops a strong voice both within the student community and in his own authenticity – features of the journey to becoming a student. In part, due to his course building on his occupational identity and aligning with his preferred ways of learning – participative and practical elements such as studio work, laboratory work, tutorials and computer-based techniques. Jamie is most engaged when his experience is utilised in the learning process. While Jamie finds examinations challenging he values the opportunity to draw on his occupational identity and

knowledge and is motivated by the high expectations placed on him:

I don't think I go unnoticed, I get like As in design projects... I think our tutors do recognise that I've got, that I've produced work that a builder could interpret and they expect that from me, knowing that I've got the experience that I've got.

(Jamie, first interview)

He recognises his strengths lay within the artistic elements but that he needs support with the mathematical aspects. He acknowledges his disadvantage by his time out of formal education but feels his occupational identity enhances his learning through his underpinning knowledge and skills. Jamie appears to understand how to draw on the support of the course community to help him improve his learning. The course technician helps Jamie develop his academic skills while he draws the support of peers to help bridge gaps in his mathematical knowledge:

Me and maths just don't go... So, I made friends... I would explain to them that I hadn't been to school for a long time, please just make me understand this? They would know how to tell it to me so that I would understand it all. They would put it in a context where it would make sense to me.

(Jamie, first interview)

Jamie's identity as a successful student comes from the evaluation of his relationship with his peers and tutors. He aligns himself with students he perceives as having a mature outlook, and as his course progresses he takes on a role of supporting others and in doing so positions himself as a leader within the course community. Jamie's narratives reflect a transformation as he develops a desire to make a difference in both architecture and how individuals are educated:

I'm aspiring to be that architect who designs with the builder in mind, and I help all the kids in the class, some of them are young, some are older than me but less experienced. So, I help them, I tell them, some of them come to me and ask me like what does this mean, and I just say what I think.

(Jamie, second interview)

One of the most significant impacts of this relationship was Shaun's advice on graduation opportunities and helping to ensure Jamie is well placed in the graduate labour market. This advice leads to Jamie becoming a student representative and to seek improvements to course delivery.

Jamie's learning career was plagued by discontinuity and he was acutely aware of the less desirable place he may be returned to if he failed to achieve his degree. This heightened sense of risk creates a motivation to succeed and to draw on the resources of those around him. Particularly poignant is his concerns about being subjected to ridicule by colleagues and peers.

I thought if I don't pass this first year then what am I going to do? Go back bricklaying, and everyone's going to be like, ha, ha you didn't do it.

(Jamie, first interview)

Jamie's account offers a strong sense of the transformative power of learning. His narrative reflects the struggles other mature, working-class students must confront in their transition to HE (Reay, 2002). One of trying to negotiate a balance between investing in a new improved identity and holding on to a cohesive self that retains an anchor in what had gone before; between escape and 'holding on' (Lawler, 2000):

I used to be a different person, I've done a lot of growing up... I had some quite ignorant views... I wasn't right, I wasn't a positive person, but your eyes are opened as you learn more... I mean, I was that person who said I couldn't do it, and part of me, until I did it, a lot of me wasn't sure I could do it, whether I could come to uni.

(Jamie, first interview)

While Jamie's transition was not necessarily smooth and linear; his narrative has remained coherent, future-orientated with his past experiences converging to enable him to become a successful HE student motivated by his future possible self:

I think that many people who come to uni, from college or sixth form, haven't made those decisions. They haven't had a taste of what the other option is... It's all fallen into place for me and it's strange. It seems like I didn't do it the way I was supposed to do it but it's all landed in the right place. I think that's just life; if you want to do something then life will just bring you there.

(Jamie, second interview)

Jamie graduated with an Upper Second-Class Honours degree and received several job offers. Having discussed these opportunities with Shaun, the course technician, he takes up a graduate role in a large consultancy firm which reflects his refined occupational identity.

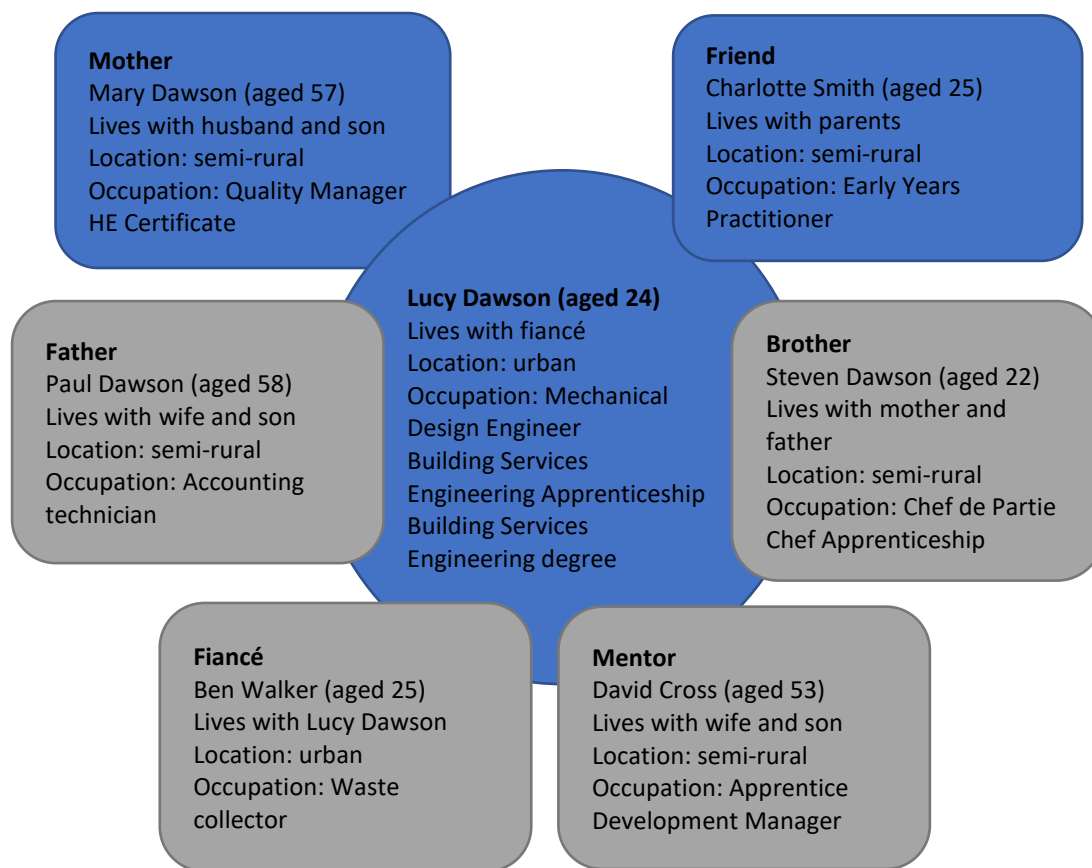
5.1.1 Understanding Jamie

The picture Jamie and his network paint of his early educational and career decision-making fit autonomous reflexivity (Archer, 2007, 2012) with accounts giving insight into the fraying of family relationships during his youth leading Jamie to be self-reliant in his decision-making. Jamie and his network's reflections around his dissatisfaction with work and turn towards HE reveals a change to Jamie's reflexivity as his approach became more communicative, turning to his sister for advice and extending his horizon for action (Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson, 1996). Jamie's HE experience is framed by his desire to remedy his previous disrupted transitions and this, along with a well-developed hoped-for and feared possible self (Markus and Nurius, 1986), contributes to his intense desire to succeed and impacts on his learning behaviour. Success is more than passing his degree; he wants to be respected, to stand out, to fulfil his academic potential and ensure he can access graduate opportunities which he views as a middle class, professional career in architecture. His becoming a student is embedded within both his occupational identity and life experience, he is not a 'blank slate' (Nelken, 2009) and his prior experience is an anchor for his learning. Jamie's narrative highlights how his HE experience is shaped by his relationships within HE, how these supported Jamie's inward trajectory from the periphery becoming a valued member of the course community of practice. More than most of the other participants Jamie demonstrates a wish to immerse himself in the HE community. Furthermore, he recognises his role and responsibility in his HE learning which is a fundamental step in becoming a student. His HE experience is life-changing, and he makes a connection between education and becoming somebody (Wexler *et al.*, 2005) and its contribution towards becoming his future possible self and from working to middle-class (Reay *et al.*, 2001).

5.2 Lucy Dawson

The Dawson network (see Figure 3) has an achieved sample of three members; Lucy, her mother Susan and her best friend Charlotte. The absent members of the network were Lucy's fiancé, father and brother, none of whom were nominated for an interview. While Lucy has recently moved away from her local area where she grew up her family network has strong interpersonal ties (Granovetter, 1973) - they enjoy spending time together, confiding in each other and reciprocating help. Lucy grew up on the outskirts of a large city where she attended her local comprehensive school and sixth form before starting an Apprenticeship at age 18. She broke gender expectations in taking up a Building Services Engineering Advanced Apprenticeship.

Figure 3 Lucy Dawson's Network



Apprenticeships are in keeping with the Dawson network values yet divergent to the routes Lucy's school friends have taken. Lucy's parents are working-class and obtained jobs at the earliest opportunity. Her mother started work in a local factory but was encouraged to attend an evening class to learn secretarial skills which led to her being given a job in the factory office. After a decade working as a secretary, she got a job teaching on a youth training scheme (YTS), going on to gain several O Levels and A Levels and embracing work-based training and development. Lucy's mother was supported to achieve a HE Diploma and advance to management level but stresses an instrumental motivation "a means to an end" to support her employment success. Lucy's brother also opted for a vocational pathway, after stumbling precariously through low paid, low skilled jobs before thriving in an Apprenticeship. The Dawson family biographies share an early entrance to the labour market and while education is valued, it is viewed in instrumental terms as a means of securing employment and financial stability.

They do [value education] they just don't value the education system, they think that's wrong, but education is important but only because it gets you into work... You want a job that's going to pay well so you can live the life you want to live and your

37 hours should pay enough without having to work extra, and the best way of doing that is getting a degree.

(Lucy, first interview)

Lucy enjoyed academic school success, finishing with excellent GCSEs (including nine A/A* grades), yet her experience was tainted by negative social relationships. Lucy attended secondary school at a time when widening participation in HE first became a government priority. While Lucy's parents aspired for her to go to university, this is in contrast to family norms. In line with contemporary expectations for young people with this level of attainment, Lucy was persuaded to study A Levels in the absence of information about possible alternatives:

I wanted to leave after GCSEs, I wanted to be an electrician... But my mum and dad wanted me to go to HE, and I didn't know what was out there. So, after my GCSEs, I stayed on and did A Levels.

(Lucy first interview)

This lack of knowledge about other pathways continued in her sixth form experience which was no less isolating:

I hated being there. I didn't want to go to university, but no one told me there were any other options... I didn't even know what Apprenticeships were. I just didn't have a clue at all.

(Lucy, first interview)

Lucy and the network narratives reflect a need for approval; she discusses her concerns about moving away from home and a desire for a more applied route. During her final year of A Levels, Lucy decides to become an electrician with her family supporting her change in direction:

I think she was just heartily sick of that endless study for no reason at all. She couldn't see the point of it. But once she started working she could see the application of the skills, and she needed that... She got a lot of thrill from driving herself and achieving academically but wanted to use it in a more practical sense.

(Mary, Lucy's mother)

Through her work, Lucy's mother was able to access information about the local employment

market and Apprenticeships, in particular, those which were well-respected locally. She encouraged Lucy to apply for an Electrical Apprenticeship with a reputable organisation but having missed the application deadline Lucy's application was directed to a more demanding Building Services Engineering Advanced Apprenticeship. Lucy is extremely positive about all aspects of her Apprenticeship and describes a rich learning environment with many expansive features (Fuller and Unwin, 2003). The scheme was well-established with Apprentice's studying a range of qualifications, receiving comprehensive internal and external training including job rotation and being recognised as learners on a journey to becoming productive employees. The early stages of the Apprenticeship were particularly transformative; Lucy recalls beginning the Apprenticeship with a poor attitude and being difficult to manage due to her lack of understanding about the workplace. With the support of the Apprenticeship Manager who takes on a mentoring role, she describes becoming a dedicated, motivated and valued member of the organisation and her narrative chronicles her journey from the periphery to the centre of the community of practice. Lucy's Apprenticeship Manager played a significant role in supporting and guiding her through the learning process and in helping her develop a vision for her future. This relationship became integral to Lucy's success; she has championed women in engineering and Apprenticeships more generally for the organisation which has been reciprocated in her being recognised with awards and opportunities.

The Apprenticeship was critical in developing Lucy's confidence and in confirming her learner and occupational identity. Central to this is the notion of competence, enabling Lucy to gain a sense of purpose achieved through the codification of knowledge and capability (Fuller and Unwin, 2003). The company has a history of supporting Apprenticeships: several senior managers have progressed from an Apprenticeship, they invest heavily in Apprenticeships, and holistically support Apprentices to become competent and skilled. Lucy has gained several awards which recognise both her achievements as an Apprentice and an engineer and her hard work and commitment. Lucy has a determination to prove herself which stems from working in a male-dominated environment and being the only one of her peers not to have attended HE. Significantly, the learning culture and structure of the Apprenticeship have amplified Lucy's ambitions. Lucy is enthusiastic when talking about the influence of the Apprenticeship in her learning career. After feeling out of place in the formal learning environment, the Apprenticeship fulfilled a critical function in restoring her learner identity and enhancing her possible self.

Approaching the completion of her Apprenticeship Lucy was presented with a range of

opportunities through which she could direct her career. She was strategic in choosing a role within the design department, in part because this would help her entry to a degree which would enable her to acquire professional accreditations. Lucy made several unsuccessful requests for employer support for degree study before being successful⁵⁶. Lucy's motivation is no less apparent in her degree which she attributes to understanding the impact the degree will have on her future career. Lucy made a successful transition into HE and while she had concerns about the academic demands and assessment regimes the link between her developing academic knowledge and her work role created a beneficial synergy. Her degree brought together employed part-time students and 'traditional' full-time students with the teaching and learning reflecting this diversity. Lucy benefitted from teaching by both academic lecturers and industry experts and highly valued having a dissertation supervisor from industry who respected Lucy's perspective and experience.

I was scared that I wasn't going to be smart enough. I was worried, there's a structure to the academic marking system and I was really scared that I wouldn't be able to get across that structure in my work. But luckily there's a lot of industry people teaching the course, and you get quite a bit of balance.

(Lucy, first interview)

While the Apprenticeship developed her engineering competence, Lucy views the degree as giving her broader theoretical knowledge, the opportunity to reflect on her practice, and develop her "own opinion on things". This is an intense reflection of becoming; internalising her knowledge, creating an authentic voice, coming to understand herself within her field of study. Furthermore, the course structure created learning spaces which enabled students to share expertise, knowledge and to expand their professional networks.

The guys on our course, we all talk to each other, they ask what we've been doing, and we share work, and we learn a lot from each other... I've learnt quite a lot, and it's nice to know what people do in the industry, that's really good.

(Lucy, second interview)

Lucy is aware of the increase in HE participation: "everyone has degrees... if you don't have a degree, it impacts on your progression." Since starting work her aspirations and understanding about the career opportunities open to her have broadened. She is conscious of being

⁵⁶ Lucy commenced her degree in 2011 when the tuition fee was capped at £3,290. For students who started their course on or after 1 September 2012 the tuition fee cap was increased to £9,000.

professionally competitive; her motivation for the degree was to gain credentials and professional recognition. Unexpectedly for Lucy, she found the university experience personally transformative, graduating with a heightened self-confidence and a more robust occupational identity. There is also a transformation of the person she wants to become and a desire to make a difference in her field:

She wants to use her skills for ethical reasons; there is always something underlying that ultimately when she has a choice, she will seek to use them in a very ethical way, in a positive way.

(Mary, Lucy's mother)

Lucy graduated with a First Class Honours degree which has opened doors; she was awarded a travel bursary to visit a developing country to research renewable energy systems. Her commitment was recognised in the workplace with her gaining a significant promotion and professional accreditation.

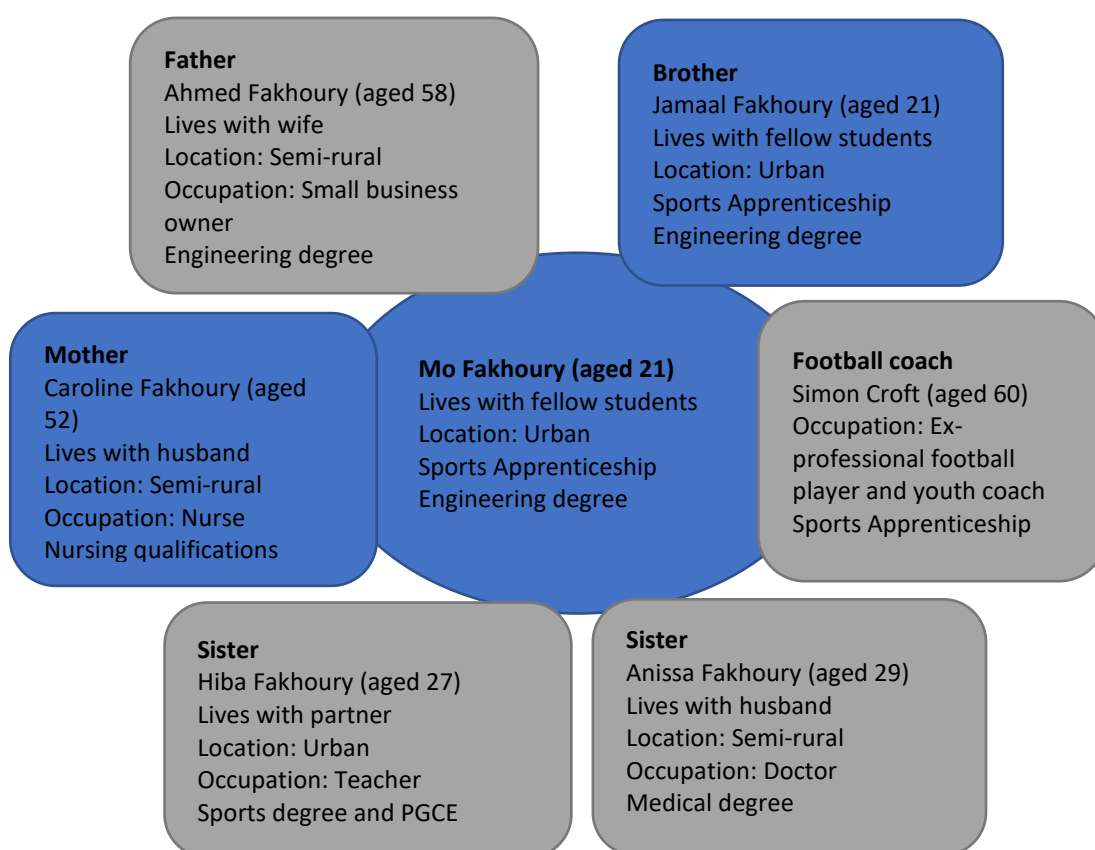
5.2.1 Understanding Lucy

The narratives of Lucy and her network suggest she aligns with a communicative approach and has a strong need for confirmation from others in her decision making, which coupled with the close family relationships support her need for 'thought and talk' (Archer, 2003). Lucy's relationship with her Apprenticeship Manager broadened her network of support providing her with an interlocutor who understood the career opportunities within her sector. While there is little change in Lucy's dominant mode of reflexivity, the changes within her network extended her horizons for action enhancing her perception of her possible self. A dominant theme of the network is that there was little doubt of Lucy's academic and career potential and her ability to navigate life events to 'become somebody' personally, educationally and occupationally (see Ball, Maguire and Macrae, 2000a; Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996; Colley, 2006; Hodkinson *et al.*, 2007). The broadening of Lucy's network through work and HE framed Lucy's view of her future self that may be plausible and possible (Markus and Nurius, 1986). A belief that a professional career and degree in engineering became a possibility and providing a clear goal for Lucy to work towards. Over the course of her HE programme, this became further focused on specific roles and highly realisable whereby Lucy could tangibly relate her possible self to her current actions.

5.3 Mo Fakhoury

The Fakhoury network (see Figure 4) has an achieved sample of three members; Mo, his mother Caroline and his identical twin Jamaal. Mo is from a mixed ethnic background, with an Arabic father and White British mother. He discusses the influence of his sisters' and his father, Ahmed but these family members were not nominated for an interview but nevertheless were significant influences. Mo grew up in a small affluent town close to several urban conurbations and with his siblings attended a local comprehensive school. He excelled academically at school before progressing, with his twin brother, into an Advanced Apprenticeship in Sporting Excellence (AASE)⁵⁷ at a National League professional football club, City FC.

Figure 4 Mo Fakhoury's Network



Mo's sisters achieved similar academic success and both progressed to university. Mo's father who is from the Middle East moved to England to study for an Electrical Engineering degree. His mother, influenced by her grandmother's illness became a nurse after completing a

⁵⁷ The Advanced Apprenticeship in Sporting Excellence (AASE) is a sports performance programme providing structured training and development across several sports for elite young athletes. The programme has also been designed so that if an athlete falls short of their goal, they have the skills, knowledge and qualifications to pursue a secondary or supplementary career.

hospital-based training programme. Ahmed worked as an engineer before opening several take-away restaurants where Mo and his siblings worked around their studies. While Mo's parents have strong academic achievements; their careers have not proved to be financially generous. However, a more liberal commitment to education permeates the family's values compared to the other networks presented. Mo's mother is considering 'topping up' to a nursing degree as she recognises that less physically demanding opportunities within nursing management would enable her to work for longer. Mo is a non-traditional student by virtue of his post-16 pathway, yet he is a typical middle-class student with a family tradition of HE participation. His narrative illuminates the strength of the interconnections between the role of his network, his emerging identity and experience of refocussing his future possible self.

Mo's interest in football began in his childhood; he played throughout school and both with his brother was 'spotted' by City FC during the final year of their GCSEs leading to them being offered Advanced Apprenticeships. Sport is a central element of Mo's biography which was facilitated through by significant support of his parents:

The amount of time and effort my mum and dad did to take me and my brother to football, my sister who did gymnastics... They have made a lot of sacrifices for me to get where I am, and I'm thankful for it.

(Mo, first interview)

While his parents were encouraging of their children's sporting talents, they placed a high value on academic success and encouraged balance in the demands of both aspects of their children's lives. Mo combined academic study with football, and despite having secured an Apprenticeship, he worked hard to achieve excellent GCSE grades. While Mo's parents "were proud, especially my dad" at him being offered an Apprenticeship his mother was apprehensive due to the sport's unpredictability:

It can be quite an emotional rollercoaster for them from one season to the other. Am I staying? Am I going? Do they want me? Do they not?

(Caroline, Mo's mother)

Mo's network is extremely close, reflected in open discussion with his parents about the opportunity with the resulting support for Mo to follow his dream. He entered the Apprenticeship with a realistic view of the frailty of his possible future and of the future decisions he may be required to make. With the network's tradition of HE participation, there

was a pre-formulated plan around HE as an alternative pathway as a means of negotiating the risks of a football career:

It was a decent level of football, but we didn't think it would be long-term, so we always had a backup plan. Obviously, they did very well at school as well, so they were quite fortunate... We sort of knew that they would be academically good enough to continue in another career.

(Caroline, Mo's mother)

Mo's Apprenticeship was a positive experience "to play football like five/six days a week, earn some money at the same time but still do a college course was a great experience" moving Mo's hobby into the realms of a possible future: "I nearly made it". The Apprenticeship had many expansive features (Fuller and Unwin, 2003) and provided a rich learning experience. Mo undertook additional qualifications and attended college with the balance of the week spent training and playing matches. There was a coherent feedback loop between City FC and the college, which ensured his development was well-planned and closely monitored. Mo is enthusiastic about the personal development the Apprenticeship offered "I've developed teamwork skills, communication, leadership skills and they will help me for the rest of life". Yet, disappointingly, Mo and his brother were informed towards the end of his Apprenticeship that they would be released⁵⁸. However, he was reflective rather than resentful:

Life's like that isn't it, sometimes one door closes, and another door opens. My Apprenticeship helped me become who I am.

(Mo, first interview)

Mo turned again to seek the views of his network, trusting their opinion and caring about their involvement in his life. A family friend, a respected ex-professional football player and youth coach, further advised Mo not to pursue other football contracts but to aim for university:

He said, "You would decline your university offers, and then three months down the line you still haven't found anything or six months down the line you haven't found anything, and you have then got another year before you can go to uni."

(Mo, first interview)

Mo chose not to pursue a sport-based career, opting instead for engineering which he

⁵⁸ City FC narrowly missed out on promotion to the Football League above and cut much of their youth programme due to funding restrictions.

perceived as a “more financially rewarding career”; a reflection of the new realities of HE (Harvey, 2000). His brother also chose engineering, which they view as following in their father’s footsteps. Mo’s college tutors were instrumental in helping him navigate the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) system illustrating both the expansive nature of the Apprenticeship (Fuller and Unwin, 2003) and the recognised fragility of a football career. Mo understood that his Apprenticeship qualifications might restrict his entry to a respected engineering degree and was directed towards Foundation Year programmes. Struggling to locate information about Foundation Years, he telephoned round several elite universities admissions departments to explore potential opportunities. Mo’s pursuit of HE was underpinned by a strong sense that university was part of his life plan and while Mo was course search practical; it was framed by an understanding of the stratified nature of HE and desire to attend an elite university.

Mo’s narrative offers insight into becoming a learner at university, which for him has involved the reconstruction of a secure learning identity. Mo entered university with a sense of competence stemming from both positive school and Apprenticeship experiences. However, having moved from sports to engineering, his occupational identity (Kielhofner, 2002) was disrupted and he struggled to make the transition to the scholarly world of the university leading to a crisis of confidence in a context that felt unfamiliar:

I don’t think I was as prepared as I thought I was. Some of the maths I already knew but the fact I’d done nothing for two years straight was like, it hit me harder than I expected it to.

(Mo, first interview)

An element of his anxiety and frustration appears to be borne from the erosion of his academic and occupational identity as he struggles to make the transition to university and perceived himself as less able than his peers:

In GCSEs, I was always near the top of the class, especially in maths... However, taking two years out to play football and coming back was the hardest bit. I hadn’t done maths for two years. It did feel like they [fellow students] had an advantage over me because they might have failed maths, but at least they had been doing it for two years.

(Mo, second interview)

Despite the accessibility of the Foundation Year, Mo struggled with the demands and considered withdrawing; yet he persevered with the support of friends and family. Despite a challenging Foundation Year, the experience smoothed the way into the degree through developing his underpinning academic knowledge, helping him acquire an understanding of the expectations of being a university student and enabling him to build meaningful relationships.

I gradually got used to it, but it was hard to adapt the new style of teaching. The whole teaching style is completely different; it takes a while to get used to... When I came into this year, at the start of my degree, I was used to uni's way of teaching because I'd been here for the foundation year.

(Mo, first interview)

Beginning to feel like part of the university community contributed to the growth in his academic confidence and his feelings of integration and worth within the university community. This is reflective of literature that suggests positive student-staff relationships are crucial in supporting student self-confidence and motivation (Tinto, 2006; Thomas, 2013). Mo develops a constructive relationship with his personal tutor "I feel like I can go to him about anything be it academic or personal" as well as other members of academic staff including the Head of Department:

He will stop and ask how are you and how are things going. It makes me feel a lot more welcomed, they are there to do a job but its friendly at the same time... It did make you feel welcome and fitted into uni... They understand that uni can be stressful and they are there to help when you need them.

(Mo, second interview)

This sense of community, being able to relate to staff and peers and know where to turn for support has been fundamental in Mo becoming a successful university student. The relationships and interactions have been crucial in supporting the (re)development of his learner identity. Similarly, mutual peer support was critical in helping build Mo's student identity. When he encountered difficulties with mathematics, he actively sought assistance from support services and later reciprocated this by helping a struggling peer. His descriptions not only illuminate a significant change in his confidence in being a student but also a movement towards the mainstream of the university community.

He [fellow student] came in, sat down and went ‘I haven’t got a clue what I’m talking about’, and within half an hour he could solve the problem. It points where you have helped each other... Turning points like that they sort of see you through the times where you feel like you don’t want to be doing this.

(Mo, second interview)

This experience of becoming a university student has been transformative with Mo’s increasing confidence in his academic and broader abilities, an essential aspect in the (re)construction of his learner identity. However, this growth has not been linear but has peaked and troughed with successes and disappointments. As Mo’s disposition to learning matured, he began to think and work more independently and trust in his own resources (Archer, 2003). He became more confident in taking risks driven by his aspirations and ambitions, one of which was moving to Australia for the second year of his degree. This experience had a transformative effect on Mo’s identity as well as a profound impact on his self-perception.

I didn’t dream of how much I would have got from this year. I knew I would make friends and experience a different culture, but the amount of life skills, my confidence, enthusiasm to do new stuff and experience new places has been second to none.

(Mo, third interview)

In later interviews, Mo’s reconstructed learner identity facilitated the embracing of opportunities and experiences that he previously would not have considered, which is recognised by his mother:

He has sort of grown in confidence to take on board every opportunity he could possibly take from the last few years. Whatever experience has been thrown at him he has taken it with open arms.

(Caroline, Mo’s mother)

Yet, as doors have opened Mo became acutely aware that a “degree is not enough” (Tomlinson, 2008; Bathmaker, Ingram and Waller, 2013) to compete in the graduate labour market and recognised that extra-curricular activities⁵⁹ would enhance his CV and future

⁵⁹ Mo also started playing football for the university football team but left the team due to time and financial constraints choosing to continue to play league football instead.

employment opportunities. Throughout university, Mo's primary extracurricular activity was playing for a team in the Football League which also gave him a small income. Recognising that he did not have the connections to access internships or graduate employment, he concentrated on achieving high grades to maximise his chances of obtaining opportunities. He successfully gained a summer internship at a large national bank but recognised that the networks he developed in Australia may prove fruitful:

The contacts I've made, I'm looking at coming back out here to work once I've finished and one of the lads who I've met through my course could possibly set me up with a job ready for when I finish.

(Mo, third interview)

Mo returned from Australia reinvigorated to finish his degree, he graduated with an Upper Second-Class Honours degree and utilised his Australian network to secure a graduate level role in civil engineering.

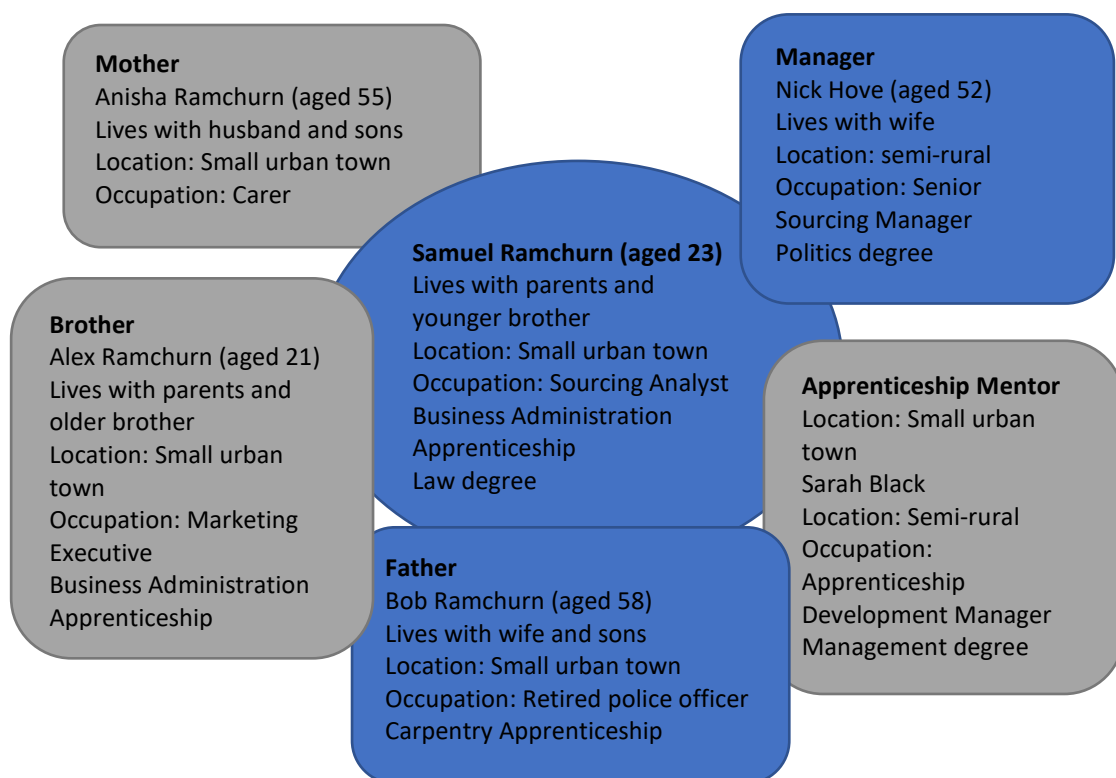
5.3.1 Understanding Mo

Mo approaches decision-making communicatively (Archer, 2003), externalising his options and seeking the views of his network whose opinion he trusts and cares deeply about their involvement in his life. As a young man, Mo navigates a significant disruption to his possible future when he is released from his football Apprenticeship. He turns to his network for support on redefining his future career with his decision around HE participation being a response to this disruption and closely linked to traditions of his family network (Fuller *et al.*, 2008; Heath, Fuller and Paton, 2008). As Mo matures, he begins to think and work more independently, with a trust in his own rather than others' resources (Archer, 2003). He becomes more confident in taking risks driven by his personal and career ambitions, one of which was a year in Australia as part of his degree. While other participants had expressed temporary concerns about not being ready for HE learner they often reflected on being confident in their field underpinned by an occupational identity which was missing from Mo narrative. Mo's becoming a student was influenced by social and academic factors; transition to a new field of study, engagement with peers, integration into the HE community, and the recognition of his role and responsibility for his learning. Despite initial thoughts of withdrawal, Mo's narrative reflects his academic progress and the interplay of relationships and academic success to his becoming a student (Crossan *et al.*, 2003).

5.4 Samuel Ramchurn

The Ramchurn network (see Figure 5) has an achieved sample of three members; Samuel, his father who is a retired police officer, and his line manager. The absent members of the network were Samuel's mother who is a care worker, his younger brother, and his Apprentice Mentor, none of whom were nominated for an interview. Samuel lives at home with his parents and younger brother in a small town which is well connected to several cities and towns. The network's familiarity lies with work-based learning, his father initially trained as a carpenter, his mother obtained several work-based NVQs, and his younger brother also completed an Advanced Apprenticeship. Education is valued instrumentally, as a means of securing employment with aspirations towards HE participation unusual in the network.

Figure 5 Samuel Ramchurn's Network



Samuel was a high achiever; he gained twelve A* to B grades at GCSEs and A and B grades in A Level Law, Business, Accounting and AS Level French and Latin and was driven by a possible future as a lawyer:

I always aimed to be a lawyer, kind of a barrister, solicitor route, that's the thing I've always wanted to do since I was a little person... I've always known my direction... Go through school, college, uni et cetera.

(Samuel, first interview)

This future self distinctly shaped Samuel's decisions and the way he exercised agency to develop his early career which he viewed as interconnected with a future law career. This clear direction motivated his strong academic achievement which he links to a possible long-term self (Markus and Nurius, 1986). While Samuel's transitions have not always been stable, he has retained a constant sense of self, who he is and what he wants to become. However, Samuel's concept of a law career is nebulous, under continual reconstruction, shaped by his ongoing work experiences and eventually rejected.

Samuel's diligence and hard-work throughout his post-16 experience and "an amazing experience" at an Aimhigher Summer School⁶⁰ led to an offer of a place at an elite university. This 'pragmatically rational' decision (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996) to participate in HE was informed by the perception of his options and closely bound to his high-achieving academic identity. Samuel studied in a post-16 environment where HE was viewed as the next step with high levels of progression to HE. However, shortly before the start of his Law degree, Samuel's perception of the financial cost began to outweigh the benefits, and he declined his place:

It just hit me, the cost of university... The main thing was I couldn't put that burden on my parents; they were saying "oh we'll help you out" ... But it comes down to thousands and thousands, and I think after a lot of deliberation and a lot of thinking I actually thought no... I couldn't put the burden on my parents.

(Samuel, first interview)

Samuel recognised the low level of risk attached to declining the university place and understood university would be available to him in the future. Samuel did not reveal to his parents the reason for declining the university place "then it would have been a guilt thing really, not that it was their burden to take". Samuel's narrative speaks strongly of autonomy (Archer, 2007) in making decisions about his future, despite a close relationship with his family. His network lacked understanding about the financial cost of HE and he felt were unable to enhance his decision-making; this may also contribute to their support for his decision to reject his university place:

They actually didn't react as you'd imagine if they were adamant that that was my

⁶⁰ Summer schools were highly regarded due to the total immersion of young people within the HE environment; attending lectures, participating in personal development activities, living in student accommodation and meeting student ambassadors from backgrounds like their own.

route; they were more supportive... They've never forced any of us or pushed any of us to go down that route. All they wanted was for us is to have a good job and be secure in that way.

(Samuel, first interview)

Samuel did not have a backup plan and lacked awareness of alternative opportunities, but his concern over the financial burden was overwhelming. Samuel began working in a supermarket which gave him time "to clearly think my head out for a bit" and this experience reinforced Samuel's aspirations for a professional career:

I knew that [working in a supermarket] was something I didn't want to end up doing. I know you can get into a little rut where that becomes the easiest thing.

(Samuel, first interview)

Samuel became distanced from his college friends who had moved away for university and turned to his amateur boxing club for friendships⁶¹. This interest in boxing was central to the (re)construction of his sense of self and identity. At school, he had suffered from racist bullying which had impacted on his confidence and manifested itself through, amongst other things, an insecurity of speaking in public. Being part of a boxing club was Samuel first experience of being part of a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) and provided him with a focus while he was trying to make sense of his future direction. He formed friendships with older boxers who were grounded in their careers which was aspirational for Samuel:

Around that time in college I was out every night, but then I started getting down to the amateur boxing, getting into the work environment and actually I stopped drinking in excess... Sometimes I look back and think am I wasting my youth? But then I don't see that as defining my youth anymore.

(Samuel, first interview)

Samuel researched alternative paths into a professional career and being aware of vocational opportunities due to his network he applied for an Advanced Apprenticeship with the local authority:

I was under the opinion that because I didn't have a degree, there weren't as many

⁶¹ Whilst Samuel maintained relationships with his friends who became university students these relationships became less important as Samuel focused on building relationships with those he perceived as being in the same stage of life and trying to build a locally-based career.

doors to a lot of the big companies and the only way to get in somewhere is to do an Apprenticeship.

(Samuel, first interview)

He secured a role within data protection which he narrates as being linked to his law ambitions. In many ways, his Apprenticeship was expansive (Fuller and Unwin, 2003) he achieved several qualifications, learned on and off the job and was given support for continued progression. It also represented a significant transformation in Samuels's identity, restoring his 'sense of purpose' (Erikson, 1968) and enabling him to renegotiate his learner identity.

I remember speaking to her [Sarah, Apprenticeship mentor] after I got the job she said, "we got about 170 applications or something, and you were the final" and from when she said that I thought they must have seen something in me and then I wanted to start proving myself... I enjoyed it, I actually loved learning, and I think that's something that I didn't have before.

(Samuel, first interview)

The Apprenticeship learning culture confirmed Samuel's emerging identity as a self-directed, independent learner who enjoyed learning: "no one's forcing me to get this grade, no one is forcing me to do this piece of work, and that's when I started to innovate." Nearing completion of the Apprenticeship, Samuel saw advertisements for a distance learning degree and discovered that his mentor had also gained a distance learning degree. Samuels's ownership of his Apprenticeship learning reinforced his belief that distance learning aligned with his learning preferences. Shortly after starting his degree Samuel secured a promotion in a procurement department which he felt aligned with law:

It's a different route to law. Procurement is dealing with a lot of contracts; you're writing contracts to suppliers, you are putting in these terms and conditions... So, I thought that was a great opportunity to learn contract law.

(Samuel, second interview)

Despite already studying for a degree, his workplace offered him the chance to specialise in funding him to study Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply (CIPS) qualifications. Samuel started a Level 4 course while studying for his degree and working full-time. Samuel is keen to gain educational credentials but views as being interconnected with his professional experience:

I picked up the CIPS, and that's because I do like learning, I like to learn the intricacies of the role. If you say you are Level 4, CIPS qualified they can see you have some element of knowledge.

(Samuel, second interview)

Samuel responds well to learning that he views as beneficial to his working life and recognises himself as a work-related learner with the practical application of knowledge being central to his identity.

Because of my role at work a lot of it [degree] I can put into practice as I learn the theory, so I know the examples behind it. Because I work in procurement I can bring examples, I read the theory and then think I've already done that... There is a lot of synergy because of the subject content.

(Samuel, second interview)

Samuel is keen to learn from his senior colleagues, to share his developing knowledge within the workplace and through his HE experience become more independent and self-directed. This change in disposition to learning and learner identity has also been influenced by Samuel's occupational identity as he becomes part of a complex network of relationships at work and gains professional status. Samuel's career continued its upward trajectory as he moved into the financial services sector and marked a change in how he felt he was perceived:

I got into a professional role. I started wearing a suit... Now I try and keep away from the student thing.

(Samuel, third interview)

Being exposed to a professional network has strengthened his occupational identity but has diminished his perception of the need for HE credentials: "even if worst case scenario I got a 2:2 in my degree I've still got 5 years of experience..." Samuel's professional network has also helped Samuel map his potential future self:

I know more about what I can achieve and what's out there... There are jobs I can achieve, they are within reach, and there's a pathway to get to those jobs.

(Samuel, third interview)

Samuel recognises the importance of creating a narrative of employability in his experiences and accomplishments in a way that legitimises his occupational identity. Moving companies

after the Apprenticeship assists Samuel in shedding the Apprentice identity. That is not to say that Samuel has sought to conceal his experience, but instead, he has endeavoured to construct, through a process of negotiation, an occupational identity aligned with the financial services. His ambition and determination is recognised by his manager Nick, who has mentored Samuel to strengthen his occupational identity and continue his career progression recognising that “[it] takes a special kind of character... a maturity beyond his years”. This relationship and the guidance, leadership and support offered has been highly influential on Samuel’s sense of self.

[I’ve] helped him in terms of his gravitas and the way that he presents himself because it’s all very well having all these fantastic qualifications but he needs to be able to translate into a projection of himself to other people, so people appreciate what’s he done and how he’s done it. He’s been very receptive to that approach.

(Nick Hove, Manager)

Through hard work, motivation and ambition Samuel becomes a well-respected colleague, working above his pay grade while juggling the demands of a degree and professional qualifications:

He is showing a huge amount of ambition but also hard graft and tenacity in terms of improving his career prospects.

(Nick Hove, Manager)

While Samuel’s degree is, in many ways, unrelated to his current position, he narrates a synergy and works to ensure his colleagues recognise the links. His professional and educational experience has straddled several fields, and this has both given him the flexibility to mould his career to developing interests and a broad network to draw on to help facilitate his next steps:

I’ve got the option with work to do an MBA [Master of Business Administration]. Law has always been my routes, so the LPC [Legal Practice Course] is there... A lot of my managers know lawyers and judges, so I’m trying to shadow them, but at the same time, I want to shadow my Director and stuff like that to see the breadth of work they do as well.

(Samuel, third interview)

Samuel has thrived in the fast-paced financial sector, but struggles to accept that a law career

might no longer fit with his view of his future self:

I want to do law but then you are stuck down that and what if you don't like it? I've been doing business for all this time, and I've enjoyed it, I've enjoyed the commercial aspects so what if I get into law, spend £10k doing the course, and I don't enjoy it?

(Samuel, third interview)

Samuel is reflective about the challenge of working and studying and the impact on his life. He has focused on carving out a career and occupational identity; recognising that other aspects of his life such as relationships have suffered. He has missed out on time with family and friends but considers this a worthy sacrifice for his future life: "so even though I want to get all this money and get all these jobs; eventually I want a family, and I want to be able to give them a good lifestyle".

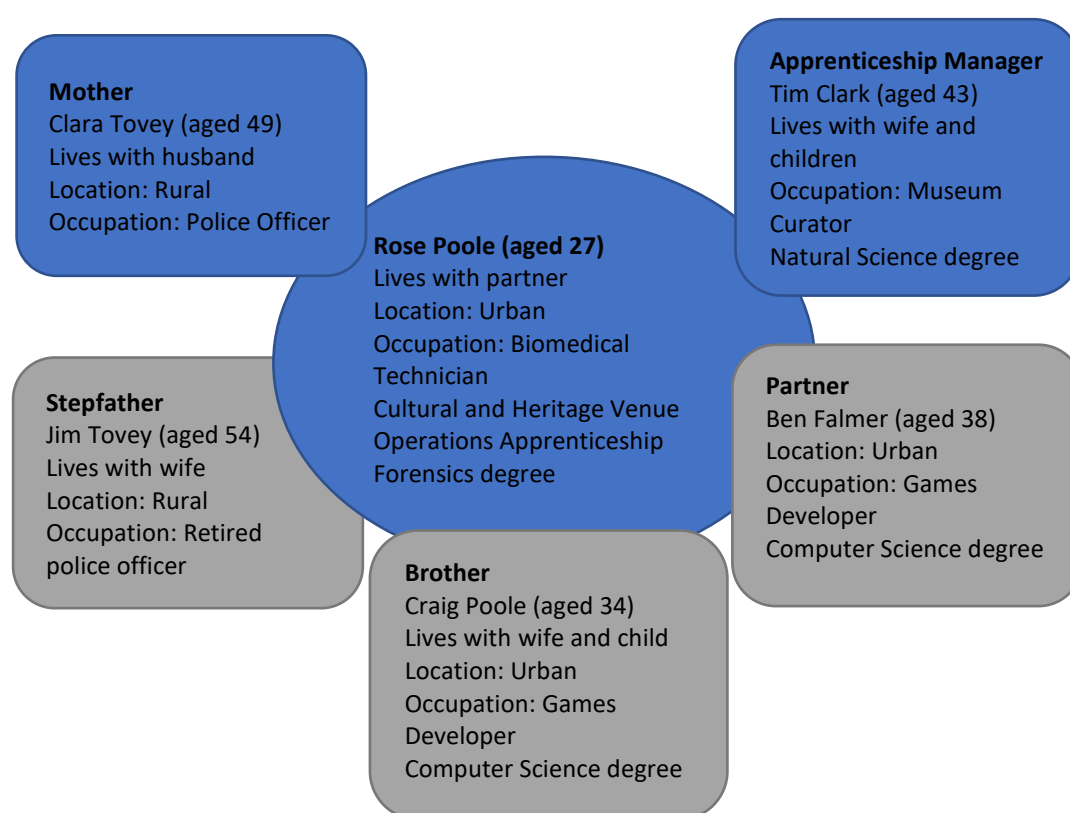
5.4.1 Understanding Samuel

Samuel's narrative highlights his autonomy (Archer, 2007) in making decisions about his future; he chooses to not involve family not due to a lack of intimacy but reflective of their lack of understanding about HE. Samuel discusses declining his university place, yet he retains a motivation for achieving a degree as he enters his Apprenticeship. Being part of a boxing club was Samuel's first experience of being part of a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) and an integral aspect of his identity while he tried to make sense of his future direction. He purposefully arranges his working life and employment position around his desire to achieve a degree; a trait aligned with autonomous reflexivity: "[who] worked reflexively at dealing with the structural constraints and enablements that they activated in the course of and as a consequence of their doings" (Archer, 2007, p.193). Samuel's involvement in the workplace enabled him to move from a newcomer, learning from those around him, to become an experienced, respected professional. His immersion in his professional work and his developing occupational identity within the financial sector is central to his learner identity and engagement in the learning process. Samuel's accounts highlight a transformation in his reflexivity around the time he begins to make a decision about using his degree to move into a law career. Despite this being a long-held realisable possible self that has defined his engagement in his degree this starts to fade from view as another possible self within the financial sector becomes plausible and is confirmed by his colleagues. Samuel becomes more communicative (Archer, 2003) sharing his concerns about his future self with his professional network who contribute to his reflections on his options may align with skills and aspirations.

5.5 Rose Poole

The Poole network (see Figure 6) has an achieved sample of three members; Rose, her mother and her Apprenticeship mentor. The absent members are Rose's partner, her step-father and her brother, none of whom were nominated for an interview. Rose grew up in a large city where she attended a local comprehensive school before going to college to retake a science GCSE equivalent. Rose's parents separated when she was very young with her mother becoming sole provider. She currently lives with her partner a short distance away from her mother and step-father.

Figure 6 Rose Poole's Network



There are many similarities between Rose and her mother's school experiences, both described being above average ability but how this conflicted with being part of a popular peer group, as her mum describes "my grades when down the pan but my popularity went up, so I was happy". Clara left school with few qualifications, joined a YTS which she did not enjoy and so describes getting married and having children to delay her decision-making. Clara's first job was in a factory, but she was forced to leave when her marriage broke down. Driven by a need to find employment which would enable her to support her young family, she reluctantly

returned to education⁶² and became a self-employed accountant. In her mid-40s, motivated by greater employment security Clara became a police officer. Chance opportunities, often based on limited information and a reluctance to engage in formal learning, but underpinned by a strong work ethic and a determination driven by the need to support herself and her children have shaped Clara's working life.

Rose left school with few qualifications being more "interested in messing about with friends" and not being "bothered about being anything as long as I just had enough to get by". She then decided to become a makeup artist but was told she could not enrol on the course without a GCSE Science which motivated her: "I didn't want to be that girl that no one really thought would make anything of herself". She started a GNVQ Science and found herself isolated in a classroom of boys. During her breaks, she helped a tutor with a project identifying hair samples and discovered a flair for forensics which led to her applying for an AVCE in Science. This was a turning point; she achieved her AVCE and a place studying Forensics at a modern university.

Rose struggled to balance the freedom university offered with the academic demands and she fell back into paying more interest to her social life: "I was just so interested in hanging out and going out clubbing." Despite this, she maintained reasonable grades, but when Clara was diagnosed with breast cancer Rose moved back home to help support her, fully intending to resume her studies once her mother recovered. However, her life started following a different path. She worked in local care homes, then moved away "to try and do something with myself there" but returned home after struggling to find any meaningful employment. During this three-year period littered with low-skilled, temporary employment she contacted her former university to explore opportunities to resume her studies. Rose reported being unable to obtain a copy of her transcript and gave up on being able to return to university. Seeing an advertisement for a museum assistant, Rose thought "that would be perfect, I would love to work in a museum". During the interview, she was made aware it was for an Apprenticeship and was enthused about having the "chance to learn and be in a cool job at the same time". Successful in securing the Apprenticeship her maturity and scientific knowledge led her to become a valued member of the team and grasped opportunities to take responsibility for a range of activities. The Apprenticeship restored Rose's confidence in her abilities, it reignited her interest in science, but she also had to navigate difficulties; she was conscious of not

⁶² Clara studied GCSE Maths and English, GNVQ Business, and several Accounting and Bookkeeping qualifications; the minimum required to become a skilled and competent book-keeper.

having a degree in a very academic field and felt that others resented her lack of qualifications. Her mother reflects on the impact of the experience and the extending of Rose's possible self:

It was just amazing because it was perfect for her. Everything that she wanted to do in the museum, it was a chance for her to get in somewhere near to what her degree was all about and it gave her the boost again to go back and finish her degree... Working in the museum, she was working around people who had degrees, people that knew what they were doing and people who talked in a certain manner and acted in a certain way and she really wanted that.

(Clara, Rose's mother)

Rose's relationships within a community of skilled practitioners and Apprentices was crucial to the rebuilding of her fragile learning career. She developed an occupational identity and interpreted the learning environments not merely as career opportunities but a chance to take control, to grow as a person and to prove to both herself and her mother her achievements. Rose is animated about the Apprenticeship, the expansive learning environment, the acquisition of specialist knowledge and earning the respect of her colleagues.

The Apprentice college tutor, on learning about Rose's difficulties returning to her degree contacted the university and advocated on Rose's behalf to obtain the transcript. Rose found a local university that offered a degree in Forensics and approached the course leader, she discussed her situation and requested admittance for her final year. At her previous institution, Rose had failed one second-year module, so the new university required Rose to complete a research report in order to secure a place. Despite the focus of the Apprenticeship being on cultural and historic venue operations, Rose and her workplace mentor had tailored her work experience to her interest in forensic anthropology. During the Apprenticeship, she worked on a project identifying and cataloguing human and non-human remains from the Neolithic period and this correlated closely with elements of her desired degree. This project helped to refresh and refine the knowledge and skills Rose had gained during the first part of her degree and in some ways enhanced her academic research and writing skills, despite having been out of a university environment for four years:

I was asked to write papers on what I was doing at that point as well... So that really helped my writing style, helped me improve how you write a scientific paper which then helped me later on at university for writing up...

The majority of the stuff we were doing in our final year was looking at bone

fragments and the skeleton as a whole, and it was looking at different kinds of damage and everything to the skeleton, so it really helped in a massive way.

(Rose, first interview)

Rose returned to her final year, better equipped to engage with the learning experience; she discusses her maturity and “taking it a lot more seriously”. Her motivations second time around were different; she focused on working hard, ensuring the best possible degree and graduate outcomes, and being more aware of the risks of failing:

I don't think I quite grasped how far behind I was compared to everyone else and being a mature student as well... Suddenly everything just became so important. I just thought I've worked so hard now to get back here; I don't want to fail it, I don't want to mess it up.

(Rose, second interview)

Rose found her return to study challenging but was driven by needing to prove herself to her network. One of the most challenging aspects was engaging in different learning and teaching style; she struggled to voice her opinions and rejected the opportunity to engage with peers in collaborative forms of learning.

At this place, it was more of a group discussion, and it was really in-depth, and I feel like I spent half my life sitting there thinking what the hell is everyone saying? They would ask me questions, and I would just be like I've no idea, I've no idea what everyone is talking about.

(Rose, first interview)

Rose's insecurity and her lack of confidence in her position within the student identity highlight her position not only on the periphery of the university but her course. Despite Rose's reluctance to engage in peer learning she found support in her lecturers and felt valued by their interest in her experience and knowledge. She developed a positive relationship with the department and her lecturers and graduated with an Upper Second-Class Honours degree. She was offered a place on a Masters degree but turned it down due to financial reasons and concerns over employment opportunities:

I thought I don't need to do it right now; I can just work for a little bit first, get some

experience behind me and then probably save a bit of money. I am planning to go and do it at some point; I'm definitely going to do it.

(Rose, second interview)

The interviews with Rose also cover post-graduation and allows access to understanding how she has utilised her learning experiences in moving her career forward. Her decision-making is opportunistic rather than strategic, with little consideration given to her future and how her experience, skills and credentials may balance to form the basis of a future career other than a desire to utilise her scientific expertise and aptitude, and aspirations to work in anthropology:

I'm not entirely sure what I'm doing yet. I've got all these qualifications and how can I put them all together and do something?

(Rose, second interview)

However, the accounts of Rose and Clara highlight a complexity and tension within the network. Rose would like to share her internal deliberations with her network yet suggests "I don't have much support from family and friends". However, this is not reflective of an absence of close relationships with her network but a tension in the relationship with her mother, who has advised Rose to put her career to one side and start a family. Conversely, Clara's perception is that her daughter is, like herself, fiercely independent "she doesn't come to me for advice, she doesn't let me help her very much, she has always been like that, she's very independent".

Rose's has an aspiration to work in the museum sector, but in recognising the difficulties of securing work in this field. Limited by geography, she adjusts her ambitions and takes a job opportunity within a hospital laboratory. Despite finding the routine tedious, she hopes it will lead to a career as a Biomedical Scientist:

I'm working in the microbiology labs at the moment, and I enjoy it, but I'm getting bored of it very quickly... Once I've been there for over a year, I can apply to do extra modules on top of my degree which will qualify me as a registered Biomedical Scientist, and they've asked if I want to do that.

(Rose, third interview)

5.5.1 Understanding Rose

Rose's account highlights a learning career (Bloomer, 1997; Bloomer and Hodkinson, 1997)

that has been tumultuous and while re-engaging with education has led to a transformation of her identity it has been fragile rather than permanent (Crossan *et al.*, 2003, p.59). Rose's decision-making does not point to any dominant mode of reflexivity, but as she graduates from her degree without clear goal she exercises her agency solely in relation to her current circumstances, rather than with any reflexive control with which she wants to shape her life.

I have all these ideas of what I want to do, and then it just tends to go off in a completely different direction all the time... I'm not going to make any plans because I don't seem to follow them anyway.

(Rose, second interview)

Her decision-making becomes opportunistic which I would argue is closely related to a weakly-defined possible self, while Rose wishes to utilise her scientific knowledge and work in anthropology the few labour market opportunities within the field means this is not very probable. Rose recognises the difficulty in achieving this possible self: "I'm not entirely sure what I'm doing yet. I've got all these qualifications and how can I put them all together and do something?" While Rose benefitted from a workplace network that inspired her to complete her degree, the absence of an informed, supportive network who will listen and support her upon graduation affects Rose's ability to make sense of her concerns leading to a fracturing in her reflexivity, whereby her deliberations have lacked any conclusions:

It is difficult when you come out of uni, and you are like what am I doing? Who do I need to speak to, to figure out what I can do with my degree? I'm never going to be a forensic anthropologist, paleopathology is going to be of a personal interest than career, so I don't really know what else I can do with my degree and what else I can apply it to.

(Rose, third interview)

5.6 Apprentice networks: what can we learn from these cases?

The case studies presented in this chapter powerfully demonstrate wide variations in the backgrounds and dispositions of individuals' who have moved from Apprenticeships into HE. However, there are common themes in these narratives. The influence of family and network values in decision-making around learning participation is clear in all the accounts, particularly those of Jamie, Lucy and Mo who are the most communicative. Their narratives demonstrate the influence of structural forces which manifests in terms of the pathways taken through the

post-compulsory education system. Yet, the accounts of the former Apprentices and their networks reflect a temporality in influence. The construction of possible selves has been recognised as taking place within the context of significant relationships, particularly with family members (Erikson, 1994; Kerpelman and Pittman, 2001; Li and Kerpelman, 2007). Yet these case studies highlight the dynamic nature of the social and workplace contexts which have a resulting impact on learner and occupational identity which are under construction.

The cases also reveal the power of individual agency in terms of how the Apprentices choose to respond to situations. Jamie and Rose talk of being ambivalent towards their education yet they both have siblings who went straight to university which suggests that while vocational learning is highly valued within their networks, there is a distinct element of choice. Similarly, Lucy and Samuel both considered going straight to university after their A Levels; it was matters of finances and learning style which they attribute to their decision not to attend. That HE was on the horizon within these networks, no matter how weakly, is significant. Furthermore, the expansive elements of the participants' Apprenticeships and the relationships fostered through these learning experiences expanded these horizons, bringing a different possible self into view.

The five case studies presented here highlight only five networks and in the following two chapters I draw on the accounts of others who participated in the study to further understand being an Apprentice and becoming a student.

Chapter 6. The biographical journey to being an Apprentice

The following two chapters revisit the theoretical base drawing upon the social network accounts as well as the individual biographical narratives to offer an evaluation of the ideas and concepts. While the previous chapter focused on the case studies of five Apprentices and their networks this chapter draws thematically on the sixteen Apprentices' journeys to being an Apprentice. In presenting the data in this way, I have sought to remind the reader that these are thematic experiences which relate to one's life as a whole. It commences with analysis of early educational experiences and the Apprentice learning journey, recognising the central importance of occupational identity and the role of networks in the turn towards HE.

6.1 Representations of narrative data

In presenting data about biographical and lived experiences, I have been all too aware of the difficult decisions of what to ignore and what to embrace from the data (Coffey, 2001). In representing the participants' narratives, I have focused the analysis under several thematic headings. These themes have been drawn directly from the data, but have been framed and informed by my agenda both explicitly and more subtly. I have found myself anxious about 'doing justice' to the participants' experiences, and the choices over whose accounts to include involved compromise and selectivity (Etherington, 2004). I felt the need to justify, even to myself, what to include in the final selection and what to omit. My own life history and subjectivities are so intricately entwined with the whole research process that these must be acknowledged (Merrill and West, 2009). That said, the connections and accounts have not been 'cherry picked' to answer the research questions but presented themselves most obviously and convincingly. I also acknowledge there may be other, equally valuable and important, translations of the data which this thesis does not utilise.

The narrative interviews covered a broad range of topics; some were recurring points of discussion and addressed in all the interviews, such as academic progress, peer relationships, social and academic HE experience and future ambitions. Specific themes, such as Apprenticeship experience and HE decision-making, were only discussed in the first interview with latter interviews being more customised to the individuals. The information presented in this analysis is only a small fraction of that generated, which is itself just a minor element of the individuals' lived experience. I have sought, as far as possible, to present the analysis in the words of the participant with an overriding concern being their intended meaning. To aid with this, I chose to abridge my voice and to focus on the participants' words. The themes which

began to emerge came out of a long and arduous process of transcription and processual form of analysis.

6.2 Early educational experiences and learner journeys

One area this study is concerned with is how early educational experiences relate to pathways into and through the Apprenticeship system. At the start of the first interview, I invited participants to talk about themselves and what led them to an Apprenticeship, being most interested in how educational experiences contributed to their decision to pursue an Apprenticeship and their subsequent educational choices. I was primarily interested in the version they presumably had told before, either to themselves or others and hoped to interpret what degree their educational experiences had a bearing, if any, on their more recent identities. This first section explores the social context in which perceptions of learning are formed; exploring school experience, perceptions of school and the influence of social networks on educational decision-making.

The participants' compulsory school experiences might be placed on a spectrum from negative and dispassionate to positive and successful. The accounts (such as by Jamie, Liam, Lucille, Nina and Rose) of these experiences which are largely dispassionate and even negative provides an explanation of the decision to seek an alternative to formal post-compulsory education. These narratives draw upon the various aspects of their experiences of compulsory schooling within the contexts of family, social networks and class and bring to life claims about HE not being part of their personal aspirations. Their experiences of compulsory schooling were diametrically opposed to those of Claire, Gethen, Mo, Sarah, and Tom whose accounts reflect an enjoyment of learning and being academically successful. The remaining participants (Elizabeth, India, Lucy, Paul, Simon, Samuel) might be placed towards the middle of the spectrum with accounts that reflect being engaged but affected by negative experiences such as bullying or family experiences that impacted learning.

6.2.1 Family tensions

Lucille and Nina's transitions between school and post-compulsory education, and the move into an Apprenticeship conflicted with their mothers' aspirations⁶³ and highlighted a complex

⁶³ Lucille, Nina and Rose all came from families where their parents had separated at a young age. The references to their fathers were infrequent, with their mothers playing a key role in supporting and guiding through their education.

parent/child dynamic which impacted on educational decisions:

My mum suggested that I just stuck it out [AS Levels] because it was quite late to start something else... It probably wasn't the best thing for me because I just didn't attend very often... I just didn't enjoy it at all; it just wasn't for me.

(Lucille, first interview)

A lot of pressure from mum as well at that point. She wasn't happy when I did the hair course. At all. Because of the grades I got. She said I was wasting my academic side on that so, she didn't see the progression in hair.

(Nina, first interview)

Nina's rebellion against her mother initially led her down a vocational track which left her unfulfilled, so she embarked on A Level study but after completion asserted her rejection of academic learning through choosing an Apprenticeship. Nina's early experiences resonate with notions of vocational cul-de-sacs: "caught in a credentials trap, pushed down a narrow vocational path, which often involved low paid, gendered employment" (Bowl, 2003, p.56). While Lucille initially succumbed to her mother's wishes and started A Levels she withdrew and commenced an Advanced Apprenticeship. Lucille's experience adds a further dimension to Bowl's work in that her decision to follow a vocational route was not due to a negative perception of her academic ability, but a preference towards learning and earning. She understood the Apprenticeship could lead to HE⁶⁴ and provide an alternative means to achieve her ambition of becoming a primary school teacher.

6.2.2 Rejection of formal learning

Lucille, Lucy, Paul and Elizabeth's narratives reveal a multifarious combination of feeling disenfranchised by the school system and unnurtured at school which led them to believe that a vocational pathway would be better suited to their learning preferences. As Elizabeth and Lucy excerpts outlines:

I hated school. I just did Sixth Form, I hated being there I didn't want to go to university, but no one told me there were any other options. No one says to you

⁶⁴ Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) is a professional status for practitioners in England at the Early Years Foundation Stage (ages 0 – 5). It was introduced in 2007, via the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) and requires the professional to gain a HE qualification. By 2015, all full daycare settings were required to have at least one EYPS status employee.

there are other options out there. I didn't even know what Apprenticeship was; I just didn't have a clue at all.

(Lucy, first interview)

The school is very exam based though, and you must do this, you must go to university. To get to university, you'll have to do this, nothing about other life experiences. So, when I said I didn't want to go to university, they didn't really know what to offer me.

(Elizabeth, first interview)

This frustration with the academic environment and in the absence of high-quality advice and guidance about alternatives in the context of the journey out of compulsory schooling suggests these factors are crucial in providing young people with the confidence to make informed decisions about their futures.

Liam, Jamie, Tom and Paul also point towards a rejection of academic learning, but this relates to a network tradition of pursuing employment and VET. There was not the same frustration with the inadequate provision of information and advice, as their networks compensated by providing accessible information or 'hot knowledge' (Vincent and Ball, 1998) about local VET opportunities. Yet, despite this network knowledge, pursuing A Levels prior to finding an Apprenticeship was a shared experience:

I left school, I did one year of AS Levels, but I left to do an Apprenticeship because most of my friends were doing one and it was kind of the route I wanted to go down.

(Liam, first interview)

I didn't know what I wanted to do so I went to college and then seeing it [the Apprenticeship] again applied for it and luckily got it. I knew about it in school because my other friends who I went to school with, they applied for it.

(Tom, first interview)

These early education decisions were often pragmatic; A Levels were usually started as a means of remaining productive until an Apprenticeship could be secured. Furthermore, the narratives draw attention to the importance of networks in facilitating access to VET opportunities and highlight the impact on educational decisions of the complex and negative experiences that can arise in compulsory and post-compulsory education. In the following sections, these experiences are contrasted with slightly different stories of Samuel, Claire,

Sarah, Gethen and Mo.

6.2.3 The lure of earning

Some of the participants, particularly those who had grown up in working-class contexts, mentioned the perceived financial expense of studying in HE as a factor in seeking an alternative pathway. Samuel (Section 5.4) had a relatively positive educational experience, although his social experience was tainted by racist bullying. He withdrew his place to read Law at an elite university over concerns about finance:

I got my A Levels, got into [elite] university, filled out all the admissions stuff, got through to a couple of months before and you know, sorting out flats and accommodation, and then it just hit me, the cost of university... I couldn't put that burden on my parents.

(Samuel, first interview)

Samuel emphasises the importance of working as a case of earning over accruing debt rather than an active rejection of education. He firmly believed that there must be an alternative pathway to achieving professional status without having to accumulate debt associated with university. Securing an Advanced Apprenticeship within a well-respected organisation provided him with the opportunity to combine work and learning, and opened his eyes to the possibilities of HE through a flexible route. In an economic sense, this enabled him to progress up the rungs of the employment ladder, while allowing him to benefit from the inherent advantages of a university credential. Samuel's rejection of HE was for economic reasons, yet he acknowledged the value of a HE qualification just not gained by the traditional means.

Jamie (see Section 5.1) lacked career direction after leaving school and pointed to the economic reasons that had informed his post-compulsory education decisions. He suggests:

I didn't really do anything for a while, until my dad said: "this isn't a free ride, you've got to get a job". So, I went to Connexions and said: "look what have you got?" They pulled out all the Apprenticeship flyers, and they said you could be tradesmen if you want and they said bricklaying was good pay and relatively quick to learn.

(Jamie, first interview)

However, attributing these decisions solely to the financial implications fails to acknowledge the social complexity on which individuals base their decisions on whether to participate in

certain forms of education. Jamie's account, like Liam and Paul's, highlights the desire to escape from school and the attraction of work, reminiscent of the seminal work of Willis (1977). HE was not part of their horizons with employment viewed as a more legitimate opportunity (Archer, Pratt and Phillips, 2001). For example, when asked about her decisions not to pursue HE after A Levels Nina explains:

I didn't understand it. My mum didn't go to university, my dad did, but my dad lives in the United States. So, I didn't have a lot of contacts and there was no one else really in my pool if you see, my contact pool that really went to university, so I didn't really see the attraction of it.

(Nina, first interview)

Nina, like others, did not see university as part of her future pathway, yet her view was influenced by her perception that attending university involved living away from home and accruing significant levels of debt. Despite achieving good A Level grades she refused to explore HE opportunities: "I didn't even set up a UCAS account. I just said I don't want to do it", demonstrating the alien nature of HE participation.

6.2.4 The first missed opportunity

Claire and Rose entered HE for the second time as mature students with their entry facilitated by the Apprenticeship. Claire's re-engagement was due to her feeling she had wasted her previous university experience and was unable to draw on her credentials in the labour market:

I came to [university] and did Spanish and Language Studies which I didn't enjoy... But I did pass; I got a third... I hadn't got a good enough degree to do anything with my degree, so I just got a job.

(Claire, first interview)

Claire's could be described as typically middle-class, she attended an all-girls grammar school and her progression to university was driven by family expectations. Claire first entered HE with the idea of becoming a translator, but this was not sufficient to overpower the social aspects which ultimately impacted on her degree classification. After bringing up three children, one of whom had spent significant time in hospital, she felt a desire to "give something back" (Reay, 2003 p.301). Claire recognised she would have to re-engage with HE, this time driven by a realisable possible self, and started the Apprenticeship as a means to gain

entry to a nursing degree.

Rose (Section 5.5), is more typically working-class, she left school without GCSE Science but discovered forensics in college. She realigned her ambitions, gained entry to university but this was cut short when her mother was diagnosed with cancer. Securing an Apprenticeship in a local museum led to a series of fortuitous events and enabled her to return to complete the final year of her degree.

6.2.5 Apprenticeship as a trajectory to HE

Gethen, Mo and Sarah and are in many ways like traditional university students for whom HE is part of a normal biography (Du Bois-Reymond, 1998) with their sporting talents having led to Advanced Apprenticeship. They all discussed similar school experiences; viewing themselves as capable in the classroom and sporting environs. As Sarah discusses:

I've always quite enjoyed school. Actually, it sounds a bit weird; I had quite a good school experience... I did extra GCSEs, had a really good group of friends who I got on with really well and I think I was just quite lucky.

(Sarah, first interview)

Their school experiences were marked by their commitment to excel in their sporting fields. Their young lives revolved around combining study and time-intensive training which instilled a strong work ethos and a sense of identity. Despite high academic achievement, their networks were supportive of the opportunity to excel in a sport. This encouragement extended across the social, emotional and practical realms; ensuring they had a positive experience within sport, helping them cope with the stress and supporting with training demands:

They [my parents] supported me quite well, always supported me, everyone has in the family... They kind of agreed that even if I failed my GCSEs, I didn't want to do A-levels anyway... It wouldn't really be the end of the world, I would rather compete for my country.

(Sarah, first interview)

However, the precariousness of the sporting profession was acknowledged and all had chosen to supplement the Apprenticeship qualifications; Sarah and Gethen combined their Apprenticeships with A Levels while Mo extended his BTEC to gain additional UCAS points. Mo

and Gethen's networks conveyed a commitment to education with a classed understanding of HE participation:

When I first went into the Apprenticeship, I did enquire and say: "how feasible is it for me to do say A-Levels instead of this diploma?"... Because we come from a good academic background and both my sisters had been to uni, and my dad had been to uni, it was always prepare yourself for the worst. So, I took these extra modules to give myself a chance of going to uni.

(Mo, first interview)

6.3 Being an Apprentice

An Apprenticeship is more than the development of a set of occupational skills; it is a rite of passage, an induction into working life, the responsibilities of being an adult (Lehmann, 2007) and the beginning of the formation of occupational identity (Kirpal, 2004). As such, it is greater than a method for preparing people for work and should support the development of identity and an occupational position. Hodkinson, Biesta and James (2008) argued that existing theories of learning fail to reflect the complexity of vocational learning and introduced the notion of "learning as becoming" (ibid., p.40), developing the work of Wenger (1998) who made much of the importance of learning as a process of identity formation. For some, the Apprenticeship offered the participants the opportunity to develop a more positive learner identity and for many represented a turning point in their lives. The Apprenticeship served not only as a means of reigniting an interest in learning but also served to (re)build confidence and unlock new perspectives and opportunities.

In deepening understanding of being an Apprentice, it has been useful to draw on Fuller and Unwin's (2003, 2006, 2008) expansive-restrictive framework recognising that an Apprenticeship should go beyond the acquisition of qualifications and skills - it should be an expansive experience and "a journey through a series of stages of complexity" (Fuller and Unwin, 2009, p.410) whereby the environment facilitates learning and the expansive development of identity to underpin career growth. They argue that certain expansive features are crucial to the quality of apprenticeship learning including recognition as a learner, participation in multiple communities of practice, off-the-job training, access to a range of qualifications, and monitoring of progress. The narratives highlight the learning environments experienced and the effect on learner and occupational identity. Reflecting Fuller and Unwin (2003) expansive and restrictive features the data is presented against three overlapping

themes of participation, personal development and institutional arrangements.

6.3.1 Participation

Significantly different forms of participation were experienced depending on the practice and structure of the Apprenticeship. Learning takes place as the Apprentice engages with the practices of the community and through working alongside and interacting with experienced colleagues. However, the participants experienced considerable variation in scope, speed and purpose of their trajectories depending on the organisation and type of Apprenticeship. These differences are acutely relevant to the experience of being an Apprentice and illustrative of the expansive-restrictive continuum.

Tom, Liam, Lucy and Paul's four-year intensive engineering-based Apprenticeship held a long history within the organisation, with many colleagues having come through this route. Much of the first year was predominantly 'off-the-job' training in an engineering workshop at the local FE college or a purpose-built training centre:

The first two years, we didn't leave it [on-site training centre] we didn't go anywhere on the site. That was for all intents and purposes the workplace... It was quite a well-funded little facility. It was a bit more like a mini college environment.

(Paul, first interview)

The early stages of the Apprenticeship focused on learning the basics of engineering theory, operations and craft skills alongside other Apprentices from within their organisation or other local companies. They started as legitimate participants on the periphery of the Apprentice community of practice, learning the discipline of engineering and gaining the identity as an engineering Apprentice. For the remainder of the programme, 'off-the-job' training continued on a day-release basis with the balance of time spent in the workplace. To support a breadth of understanding job rotations enabled them to experience a range of business activities with the length of the Apprenticeship facilitated the acquisition of substantial knowledge, skills and competence-based qualifications. Lucy participated in a variety of external activities to enhance her personal development such as careers events, community development days and fundraising activities. All these participants were supervised by ex-apprentices who held a sound understanding of the purpose and value of the system; the effect of this appeared to facilitate progression for some yet impeded progress for others, depending on the organisational context.

Samuel, India, Elizabeth and Nina's Business and Administration Advanced Apprenticeship were all completed, with the exception of Nina, within local government organisations. The Apprenticeship schemes were established in the early 2000s during the resurgence of Apprenticeships. In many ways, these Apprenticeships were expansive, yet had several restrictive aspects. Apprentices were often hurried through the system, which limited the time for reflection and often gave only a narrow exposure to communities of practice. Samuel and India's Apprenticeships were departmental specific, and while Elizabeth and Nina's Apprenticeships aimed to facilitate the experience of several departments, the reality was somewhat different. Despite being employed by different organisations, both encountered similarly restrictive departmental rotation and were encouraged to apply for a permanent position due to company restructures. These positions allowed Elizabeth and Nina to continue with the Apprenticeship and become fully skilled and integrated but with the security of permanent employment. However, the lack of experience in other departments led to less access to learning in other communities of practice and forced decision-making about career direction far earlier. In gaining permanent positions, Elizabeth and Nina became a pseudo-Apprentice which gave rise to a different status and identity. Being an Apprentice on such programmes meant learning through engagement in workplace practices and with more experienced employees, yet with a short timescale to becoming a full member of the practice community. Given the speed to full participation and the limited scope of learning; the relatively weak Apprenticeship identity was offset by a stronger occupational identity. However, this does not diminish the quality of the learning and support provided including well structured 'off-the-job' learning and access to workplace mentors, some of whom were highly significant in the Apprentices' career trajectories.

There was a greater clarity to aims of the engineering Apprenticeship schemes, possibly as these Apprenticeships have historical value to the organisations. The Apprenticeship programme is fully integrated within an established system and there is a recognition that the Apprentices become 'experts' with a full understanding of the business. In contrast, the local government organisations appear to have used the Apprenticeship to address recruitment and retention difficulties and as such placed greater emphasis on creating narrow 'experts' within a specified role.

Sarah, Mo and Gethen's Apprenticeships were altogether different programmes; having the dual aim of ensuring top young athletes have access to support and training to succeed in elite sport alongside an educational programme which delivers skills, knowledge and qualifications

to pursue an alternative career. The Apprenticeships mirrors initiatives in Australia, America and Europe that provide young athletes with a chance to gain educational qualifications while also nurturing their sporting talents (Aldous, Sparkes and Brown, 2014). These Apprenticeships were well resourced –supported by an external training provider, an employer and often the sport’s governing body. The Apprentices had access to a range of Level 3 qualifications with the competency elements tailored to individual abilities and career ambitions, for example, coaching qualifications.

The remaining participants found the aims of their Apprenticeship to be less defined, yet in some ways this facilitated the adjustment of the programme to meet an Apprentice’s goals and ambitions. Rose and Simon became Cultural and Heritage Advanced Apprentices at the same time within separate organisations. These were pilot schemes, aimed at supporting the museum sector by training Apprentices to develop specific skills. Both Rose and Simon were made aware that there would be little opportunity for permanent employment at the end of the Apprenticeship, yet despite this conflict, the Apprenticeship had many expansive features. They were supported by an external training provider who regularly reviewed their progress, and both engaged in activities which took them beyond the boundaries of the workplace. They met with other Apprentices in the scheme to develop team-working skills and worked in the local community, for example, giving talks to local schools about Apprenticeships and museums. These experiences helped Simon and Rose gain access to multiple communities of practice, both inside and outside the organisation, which is reflected in their extensive social networks.

Lucille, Claire and Jamie's Apprenticeships were more problematic due to a lack of support from their managers, who seemingly viewed the Apprenticeship as a burden. Lucille and Jamie both expressed the sentiment of being exploited as cheap labour but this changed when Jamie gained alternative employment and Lucille’s manager left the organisation. The remainder of Jamie’s Apprenticeship was expansive, he refined his knowledge and skills, acquired pride in his work, and began to conform to the expectations of his employer. This reflects a journey to developing his occupational identity which served to build his self-esteem and take on a unique meaning in the context of his biography. Lucille and Claire intended to use their Apprenticeship to progress to HE, but without managerial support turned to their training provider and colleagues for help. With the support of their tutors, they were able to take ownership of their learning, to co-plan and integrate it into the workplace. While they both completed their Apprenticeship within a year, they reflected that they felt empowered

through being able to co-construct and co-manage the process.

6.3.2 Personal Development

Fuller and Unwin (2003) argue that expansive/restrictive approaches can be observed through the support for Apprentices' personal development. They suggest the most expansive Apprenticeships facilitate space to reflect on practice, the ability to envisage future opportunities and careers, and the chance to develop new identities. Some of the Apprentices had planned time away from the workplace for study as well as a respite from work routine. Sarah and Mo coached youth sports, Lucy contributed to the Apprenticeship Academy championing women in STEM and raising awareness of Apprenticeships, while Simon and Rose participated in regional museum and heritage activities. Similarly, Nina became involved in the company's Apprentice Association, helping coordinate social events, charity fundraising and community projects. Not only did these activities offer a break in routine (Wenger, 1998), but provided time and space for future visioning and the chance to enrich occupational identity through belonging to multiple communities of practice. Furthermore, Sarah, Mo and Gethen recognise the significance of progression planning: A core concept within Sports Apprenticeships is the support to vision a future alternative with comprehensive advice and guidance about opportunities for continuing their education should, as in these cases, the Apprenticeship not lead to a sports career. This experience was unique within this cohort as most participants did not have the opportunity to discuss their aspirations beyond the boundaries of their Apprenticeship.

Despite Tom, Liam, Lucy and Paul's expansive experiences within large organisations that could offer opportunities for progression, discussions about post-Apprenticeship aspirations was limited. Indeed, Tom, Liam and Paul's experiences suggest the Apprenticeship was predominantly utilised to fulfil talent requirements within the craft levels of the organisation rather than a strategy to support progression to higher levels. Liam in his first interview frequently referred to 'blue-collar' and 'white-collar' roles within his organisation with a key difference being "on the shop floor there are no development reviews whereas in the white-collar roles there is personal development reviews and support to progress". Lucy developed a better understanding of her progression opportunities predominantly due to being informally mentored by the Apprenticeship Academy manager. Through this relationship, she was exposed to opportunities within engineering management and design which fuelled her aspirations and helped her visualise a future within this field. Similarly influential was Samuel's workplace mentor, who encouraged him to visualise long-term career goals. Elizabeth and

Lucille⁶⁵ had comparable experiences, with their personal development being supported by managers who helped them to develop a long-term view which included HE. Intergenerational relationships feature strongly in many accounts of being an Apprentice, serving a protective as well as developmental function. Simon and Rose despite only being Apprentices for a short time, were mentored and supported to consider futures within the museum and cultural sector and in doing so built diverse communities of practice with often degree educated artists, academics and historians.

My boss was quite a good help. She sort of remained my mentor, still, now, she would always help me out... I mean I've got a lot of friends there, it's always interesting there because it's such a cultural melting pot... You meet all these wonderful people from all over the world.

(Simon, second interview)

Supportive working relationships were frequently revealed as being critical to Apprentices' personal development. Relationships with colleagues and managers, who often became an informal mentor, were central to the development of future career aspirations. So, despite little formal input around career progression, the relationships within communities of practice and other 'generational encounters' (Fuller and Unwin, 2003), helped participants envisage possible progression routes within and outside their organisation. The interactions and relationships not only underpinned personal development but presented the opportunity to reflect on experiences and guided the formulation of possible selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986) of which HE formed a central element. Half of the participants (see Appendix Two) had the advantage of having attained A/AS Level qualifications and alongside the qualifications, knowledge and skills gained through their Apprenticeship were well positioned to benefit from employment and educational opportunities and able to envision themselves in new roles and with new identities.

6.3.3 Institutional Arrangements

The final theme in expansive/restrictive approaches incorporates exploring the institutional arrangements and the nature of reification⁶⁶ experienced by Apprentices. As this study focuses

⁶⁵ Despite Lucille's original manager being unsupportive of the Apprenticeship, her subsequent manager was completing a work-based Foundation degree and recognised the value in Lucille's progression to a higher-level qualification.

⁶⁶ Fuller and Unwin (2003) utilise Wenger's (1998, p.58) concept of reification "the process of giving form to our experience by producing objects that congeal this experience into 'thingness'" They argue

on an individual's biography and personal experience of being an Apprenticeship and their progression from it, this aspect was less studied than those explored previously. All the Apprentices, apart from Jamie, were employed directly by the companies they trained with. Jamie was employed by an employer-based training provider, with the knowledge and technical components being delivered in-house coupled with employment-based placements. For the rest, their status was well-defined by a contract of employment which unequivocally recognised their status as employees and Apprentices with most being offered permanent positions upon completion. One of the expansive institutional features that overlap with expansive participation is access to a breadth of qualifications. For example, Jamie was supported by his second placement to develop craft stonework skills through specialist courses, Samuel and India accessed a short introductory HE module while Sarah, Mo and Gethen took additional qualifications within their Apprenticeship to support their progression.

Fuller and Unwin (2003) also emphasise reification, drawing on Wenger's (1998) conceptual definition, to illuminate the connection between practice and the quality of being an Apprentice. Wenger suggests the production of physical and conceptual objects such as tools, methods, stories, documents and resources reflect shared experience (Wenger, 2010). Expansive forms of reification are the clear and concerted attempts which elevate the Apprenticeship above the everyday process of work, such as mapping of the organisation's required knowledge and skills onto the Apprentice's learning and codifying this within formal qualifications. The well-established Apprenticeships such as the Engineering, Sporting Excellence and Business and Administration were supported by resources which assisted individual learning experiences. Managers, supervisors and internal trainers were well versed in nurturing Apprentices and ensuring they had the opportunity to gain the required skills and knowledge, which extended to the broader occupation rather than just those necessary for the Apprenticeship framework. Many of the participants talked about their Apprentice portfolio as being an integral aspect of their learning programme, providing documentary evidence and 'proof' of the knowledge acquired and skills developed. This close relationship between learning and practice, between learning and being is the central feature of situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

The reification of Claire, Lucille, Rose and Simon's Apprenticeships was less evident due to scarcer resources and fewer specialist personnel. The relevant workplace knowledge and skills

that the nature of reification (for example, through documentation, symbols and other artefacts) that apprentices encounter provides insight in to the nature of their experience.

were not as clearly mapped against the organisational needs, with an external training provider having greater responsibility for recording progress. This approach placed greater emphasis on the Apprentice and training provider working to identify how the day-to-day tasks could generate evidence against the required competency standards.

We went on workshop days, and it was mainly just finding evidence to support different things... You've got to say, "Well how can I show I've done this?"... You can either write a bit, and then you get your coach to sign it, or quite often we go on quite a lot of camps and weekends and holidays, and obviously, you do nutrition talks so you get the handouts from nutrition talks that kind of thing which would go in my folder.

(Sarah, first interview)

In these cases, the relatively under-developed training structure enabled the Apprentices to exercise their own choice in shaping their progress through the Apprenticeship. While for some their learning journeys to being Apprentices appear underdeveloped and even restrictive, the fluidity of the approach often generated varied learning opportunities, the chance to develop and demonstrate personal capabilities and to engage with a community of practice outside the workplace which helped to facilitate more in-depth learning and reflection. Many of the participants suggest that despite weaknesses in some of the institutional arrangements there was an underlying workplace culture that valued learning and development. So, while the negative association between restrictive institutional approaches and opportunities for personal growth may limit career and learning progression, this does not appear to be the case with the Apprentices in this study. In this sense, we may need to look more broadly at the role of expansive working cultures in supporting the extension of boundaries of possibilities for the participants. Despite, some of the inadequate institutional provisions many of the workplaces had clear agendas for staff development with local qualification pathways which helped guide progression routes.

6.4 From being an Apprentice to moving towards HE

The participants all highlight moments where their life course changed direction; when the opportunity, and in some cases the necessity, to enter HE became tangible. These shifts in the lifecourse have been described as transitions, turning points, branching, and life-markers, they are essentially "moments of life, [where] past decisions are reevaluated, new role expectations are confronted, and changes in lifestyle are considered" (Rönkä, Oravala and Pulkkinen, 2003,

p.203). These turning points are rarely linear, often disruptive and fragmented but the effects are both cumulative and future shaping, leading to the opening or closing of opportunities. For some, like Jamie and Claire, the points at which they began to believe that they needed the HE qualifications, were indeed, epiphanic moments (Denzin, 1989) however for others these moments were more instrumental. The Apprentices' occupational identity performs a pivotal role in how they react to the life experiences that frame their decision-making.

Life transitions cannot be disentangled from the narrative structure of individual's life history that facilitates "coherent stories about themselves and their lives in order to achieve a viable way of being in a particular context" (Ecclestone, Biesta and Hughes, 2010, p.15). Transition is more than a move from one place to another; there is also a much deeper theoretical understanding that transitions involve revision to identity, agency and 'becoming somebody' personally, educationally and occupationally (Ecclestone, 2009). It is important to distinguish between the biographies Lucille, Sarah, Mo and Gethen, whose journey to HE could be regarded as part of their normal biography (Du Bois-Reymond, 1998) compared to others who reached turning points at different life stages, whereby they recognised the importance and value of HE.

6.4.1 The role and influence of social networks

The Non-Participation in HE Project (Heath *et al.*, 2008, 2009, 2010; Fuller and Heath, 2010; Fuller, *et al.*, 2011) which has influenced the approach taken sought to understand why individuals with sufficient qualifications to enter HE had chosen not to, exploring the broader network influences on decision-making, recognising the role of turning points and constructing decision-making around HE participation as a socially embedded practice. Similarly, research in disadvantaged neighbourhoods identified how young people with similar socioeconomic backgrounds exhibited diverse, unpredictable transition resulting in different outcomes (Johnson *et al.*, 2000; Evans, 2017). The challenge then is to understand the underlying mechanisms that lead to this multiplicity.

An individual's educational experience and their access to knowledge regarding opportunities are significant factors in determining whether one might enter HE. However, these factors do not "produce a uniformity of response from those similarly situated in relation to them" (Archer, 2007, p.19). Instead, there is a dynamism to the interplay about our concerns for ourselves and our lives and how one might achieve these. An individual's internal conversation (Archer, 2003, 2007, 2012) and the extent to which they consult the advice of others may be

viewed as related to their mode of reflexivity. For example, 'autonomous reflexives' make decisions on their own often resulting in behaviour which does not conform to expectations while 'communicative reflexives' heed the opinions of their trusted networks and prefer to remain contextually congruent (see also Section 3.4).

Lucille, Samuel, Sarah, Claire, Mo and Gethen had considered, before commencing their Apprenticeship, the possibility of using the Advanced Apprenticeship qualifications to facilitate progression to HE. For the other participants, the possibility of progression came later - towards the end of the Apprenticeship or for Jamie and Liam some time afterwards. The participants' perceptions of the utility and value of a HE degree was shaped not only by their previous educational experiences but also by their relationships with their networks, some of which were newly formed through Apprenticeship. These relationships within the networks highlight several key aspects. First, the changing nature and dynamic of an individual's social networks during their early workplace experiences. Secondly, the role and influence of relationships within workplace networks and the impact upon attitudes towards the further learning. Finally, through workplace exposure the participants gained a more sophisticated understanding of the complexities and dynamics of career progression. What we see across the accounts is that networks, consisting of new and old members feature strongly, playing an influencing and, on occasions, facilitating role in the turn towards HE.

As discussed in Section 6.2, some of the participants' early education and career decisions reproduced family values with the turn to HE representing a new direction. For example, Elizabeth, India, Liam, Jamie, Lucille, Lucy, Nina, Samuel, Sarah and Tom all describe wanting to remain geographically and emotionally close to their families with their education and/or career decisions mirroring that of a significant other. Despite the apparent desire for contextual continuity, the positive experience of the Apprenticeship and gaining the respect of colleagues unearthed a self-confidence and desire to progress. Workplace networks not only nurtured self-confidence but also provided knowledge about local and flexible learning opportunities that might be available. Progression is rarely a key aim of an Apprenticeship and as such Apprentices may lack understanding about further learning opportunities. Workplace networks facilitated access to valuable and trustworthy information and advice, not only relating to courses that are local and flexible, but seen as proven and connected to the Apprentice's employment context. Some of the former Apprentice's communities of practice have a shared memory of participation in HE. As Elizabeth discusses:

There's a guy on my team, and he's a few years older than me, and he also did the

Apprenticeship scheme. He's been in my team since he first started, and he got to do the [HNC] course. He's now doing another [HND] course in civil engineering... There was also an Apprentice in the year above me who does it as well... He told me about the course and how he got into it and things like that. So, I thought I could broach the subject with my boss and see what he says.

(Elizabeth, first interview)

Access to this personal knowledge ensured Elizabeth had a better understanding of the programme, the learning environment and its accessibility but also gave her the self-assurance to make a case for progression. While some found the support of peers invaluable, others such as Lucy, Samuel and India were advised by Apprenticeship programme colleagues. Samuel and India were both encouraged to consider HE distance learning by their Apprenticeship Manager, who leveraged funds to pay for the first introductory module. Lucy and her Apprenticeship Manager developed a similar relationship and had discussed Lucy's need for a degree in order to gain chartership:

I'd been asking for the degree for a while because we have this thing called CIBSE [Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers] and to get recognised you need to be recognised by the engineering council... It used to be that you needed different types of experience but they've changed it, so now to get that status you need a BSc and experience. So, for my generation, you need the degree. So, I'd been after the degree for a while.

(Lucy, second interview)

Lucy, despite commencing her Apprenticeship with little interest in HE, was influenced by senior colleagues whom themselves had regretted not pursuing their education further:

I was speaking to one of the senior members of staff. I was asking them; did they do a degree? They said, no, but they always wished they had because they think if they had letters after their name other people would have more respect for them, that sort of thing, which I thought was an interesting take on it. You don't think about it when you've got it, but if you didn't, I think you would want it if you know what I mean.

(Lucy, second interview)

Lucy and others recognise the credential creep (Collins, 1979) with a degree being a

considerable asset in the pursuit of well-paid, rewarding forms of employment (Tomlinson, 2008) and in maintaining a positional advantage which is often dependent on credential competition (Brown, 2003). Many of the participants understood that their senior managers had gained respected occupational positions without the prerequisite HE qualification that was expected of their generation. Perceptions about the nature of the contemporary workplace were, for some like Liam, Lucille, Lucy, Jamie and Rose, a prime driver in their decision to embark on a HE qualification. Jamie and Liam made the decision to enter HE after a successful period of employment, recognising that a HE qualification may facilitate the transition to a more professional role. Like Lucille and Claire, they display an instrumental commitment towards their new career goals; a desire to translate their achievements to a professional level. As Liam discusses, the experience in the industry led to a deeper understanding and an expanded vision of a broader range career opportunities:

I felt I didn't have many options apart from where I was. I felt like I was only skilled in one specific area. I thought getting a degree, would open up a lot more opportunities. I wanted to have options rather than being restrictive. I wanted more horizons; I didn't want to be doing the same thing for the rest of my life.

(Liam, first interview)

This knowledge and the connection between workplace opportunities and qualifications, coupled with an expanded network were significant in the participants' decision-making. However, the influence of networks was not just observed within the workplace but amongst families and friends. While Jamie's employer had planted the seed (see discussion in Section 5.1) it was conversations with his sister that turned these deliberations into action. The influence of a sibling is also witnessed in Paul's account; disillusioned with his career prospects after his Apprenticeship he follows his brother's lead in exploring HE opportunities:

It was actually my [older] brother who started looking first; he's done pretty much the same route as me. He did an Apprenticeship at a company nearby that did Formula One transmission, and he started looking around at universities.

(Paul, first interview)

The influence of networks further extends to friends and partners; Lucille and Liam's partners had studied at HE level and offered support and reassurance. Liam recognises the role his girlfriend played in both his decision to progress to a HE and her support during through the learning process:

My girlfriend went through uni; I think that made a difference. Knowing someone else who has done it and seeing what she has accomplished... She's really supportive, she thinks it's a good idea, and she keeps telling me to carry on and do the degree... She comes from a strong family where they have all gone down the degree route where I have sort of not come from that background.

(Liam, first interview)

Finally, and unusually, Rose's educational trajectory was significantly transformed through the network developed during her Apprenticeship. Relationships with professional colleagues, all of whom held degree level qualifications, left Rose feeling dissatisfied that she had not completed her degree. With the encouragement of her manager and support from a college tutor Rose was able to re-enter HE. Without the interventions of this newly formed workplace network it is possible that Rose would never have returned to HE. Rose, Jamie and Paul's reflections of the network influences indicate the effect of solidarity as well as emotional and practical support. While Lucille, Liam, as well as Lucy and Elizabeth's reflections recognise the impact of social and workplace relations on encouraging them to take advantage of HE opportunities. The evidence from the Apprentices and their networks stress the importance of having trusted people within personal networks, particularly during turning points and times of decision-making for those who align with a communicative mode of reflexivity (Archer, 2003, 2007).

6.4.2 From 'working-class' jobs to 'middle-class' careers

Only half of the participants were mature students,⁶⁷ yet their occupational experiences and the contemplation given to their future gives their narratives a feel of a more mature, worldly-wise individual. The motivations for entry to HE falls mainly within a vocational theme; the desire for credentials to support entry into professional spheres, to change career, or to progress within an existing field. This aligns with other studies (Davies, 2013, Jones, 2010) that suggest part-time or mature students on vocationally related courses have an instrumentally-focused approach to HE. It became evident through the analysis that many of accounts allude to the influence of credentialism; revealing an instrumental understanding about the value of HE qualifications and the interconnection between credentials and employment within professional life. For most participants, the decision to enter HE was based on the understanding (often developed through their workplace experiences) that HE qualifications

⁶⁷ Aged 21 or over at the start of their HE course.

would grant a kind of 'exchange value' (Warmington, 2003) facilitating entry to professional fields or levels. The importance of credentialism ran through the narratives of almost all the participant narratives suggesting that credentialist notions of HE are central to those with prior workplace experiences. Few participants reflected on wanting to study for reasons of personal development, yet many recognised the profound impact that education had in creating more meaning, authenticity and agency and in some ways pulling together fragmented experiences to build coherence.

A common thread in literature on the biographies of 'non-traditional' students is an emphasis on those who were motivated to return to education in response to low paid work experiences (Archer and Hutchings, 2000; Warmington, 2003). Jamie's experience is somewhat reflective of such studies; he views his position in the labour market as peripheral with HE offering the means to escape physically demanding, unstable⁶⁸ work and could offer him the advantage to compete in the professional labour market:

I came to uni to get a better job than bricklaying job, less physical, more money, better working environment, less stress well maybe more stress but in a different way. So, I'm very much focused on as soon as this is done I'm getting in an office, and I'm getting to work to the best of my abilities.

(Jamie, first interview)

For others, Elizabeth, Lucy, Liam, Samuel, and Tom, the decision to enter HE was also linked to the notion of competitiveness and a wish to remain educationally competitive as a means to secure future prosperity. Through this is a strong connection with possible selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986) as a manifestation of a one's hopes and aspirations but also fears of what they might become in the future. Jamie and others use their HE experience and qualification not only to realise an ideal future self within the career domain but also to avoid an unfavourable self. For many, this unfavourable self consists of a future career which looks much the same as the position they found themselves in prior to starting HE. These representations of a future self have an influence on how individuals create and sustain motivation (Ruvolo and Markus, 1992) through their HE experiences which will be discussed further in Section 7.2.

Most participants viewed their working lives as successful for their current life stage yet saw a HE qualification as necessary in a future economic sense. This was coupled with the realisation

⁶⁸ Jamie acknowledges that while Bricklaying is a skilled occupational that can offer financial security, he did not have access to adequate sick pay, pensions or other benefits that professional careers offer.

that HE was potentially more accessible than they perceived, however many of the participants viewed this more flexible type of study as being different to traditional degrees and in keeping with their rejection of academic learning:

But it wasn't really a university, was it? Not like a proper university that they talk about. It is a university, I agree, but it's not the moving away bit and the full-time bit, I suppose. I am working as well as doing study, and to me that's, it is a university, but it's not.... Because I could work... I got the best of both worlds, so I am learning in the workplace and outside the workplace.

(Nina, first interview).

Rose's fractured first experience of HE preceded an unsettled work history, yet her Apprenticeship and the expansion of her network helped her form a possible desirable self in which achieving a degree was the key to unlocking opportunities. Yet this desirable possible self is under-developed, which may in part due to the career difficulties in her field of study yet this does not lessen her motivation:

I'm starting to take my adult life a lot more seriously and thinking "hey, hang on a minute I need a good job to support myself", and you know, I don't want to have to worry about anything. I don't want to be constantly worrying about whether I've got enough money to get by if I'm ever on my own. I know kind of what I want to do now and to do that I have to work really hard for it and get good grades and maybe do a Masters or a PhD.

(Rose, first interview)

Mo, Gethen, Lucille and Claire viewed their degrees as facilitating access to the kind of professional careers that they desired and potentially felt entitled to enter after graduation. Claire's previous degree had not led to a professional role but her possible self the second time around was more clearly defined and linked to her personal concerns and her wish to improve the lives of sick children and young people. Claire discusses being somewhat altruistic in her attitude towards her decisions to enter HE, couched in a career in nursing that would benefit not only herself but also her family:

I don't have a big career plan I just want to be a nurse, be a standard nurse and go to work, come home and forget about it. I want to have a job that I enjoy which is why I am doing it; I want to enjoy and feel like I'm doing something worthwhile.

Many of the working-class participants came to realise, at different stages of the life-course, the value of HE and gaining higher level credentials. The massification of HE systems, the increase in diversity of HE provision and the mainstreaming of widening participation has led to greater diversity in the student profile in some HEIs. While this diversity might not be visible to young people in school, it is possibly better understood and discussed within workplace communities. Recognising the breadth of options and opportunities in HE and the accessibility to 'people like them' informs the turn to HE. While some of the participant narratives are complex and their decisions may appear to lack elements of rationality to outsiders, it is evident how their understandings of HE changed and became a realistic opportunity which contributes to their possible self. The mainstreaming of widening participation in HE provides a means for individuals to exercise their agency; to negotiate their biographical journeys to HE, to achieve their goals and move into professional employment spheres.

6.5 Conclusions

This chapter builds on the network case studies to understand the structural and personal forces that influence pathways through the post-compulsory education system helping to set the participants' biographical journey to HE in the context of their starting points. The learning journey recognises Apprentices developing an interest in their vocation with evidence of a deepening enthusiasm and a meaningful engagement with their work. The opportunity to establish supportive workplace relationships provides strong affirmation and often an increasing self-worth. This confirmation was crucial for these Apprentices, particularly those who had become disengaged or disenchanted with formal learning.

The former Apprentices' experiences highlight the contribution of the workplace communities of practice to their development and their role in encouraging greater participation not only the learning process but in creating a future vision. Many of the journeys through the Apprenticeship reflect a growing interest in their occupational field and contemplation of the possibilities for progression either within their organisation or more broadly. This development of a possible self beyond the present leads to constructing plans for their future confirming a growing appreciation and commitment to continued learning and development.

Chapter 7. The journey from being an Apprentice to becoming a HE student

The concept of 'learning as becoming' (Lave and Wenger, 1991, Hodkinson, Biesta and James, 2008) is a means of portraying the changes in the construction of knowledge and identity that result from the participation within HE (see also Section 3.2). The changing landscape of both Apprenticeships and HE means we need to capture the diverse accounts of the student experience, depicting the lived experience of individuals in increasingly credentialised contexts. Through this we can begin to understand from a personal perspective how HE fits into their lives, experiences and biographies and how HE is perceived and valued by the participants, rather than how HE perceives and potentially (de)values them.

Representation of vocational learners that focus on depictions of deficit (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003); for example, as 'less able', from low-income families, marginalised in education, from areas of disadvantage (Pring *et al.*, 2009; Unwin and Wellington, 2001; Crawford *et al.*, 2011; Chankseliani, 2016) often overlook distinctive biographies and fail to recognise the nuanced role of individual agency as linked to context and concerns. The repeated, longitudinal interviews have drawn attention to the participants' development in their understanding about how to be effective students within the HE teaching and learning environment. For most participants, the data reflects increasing confidence in contributing to learning, a greater depth of interaction with peers and academics which is combined with an underpinning recognition of the importance of independent study. The participants acknowledged growing independence in their learning and coming to understand the standards and complexity of the work expected of them as they progressed through their course which signalled a move towards a position that felt relatively secure. Students have to learn how to become successful HE learners, and the relationships with peers and academics need to be negotiated and renegotiated, which has implications for their sense of self as a learner and the level of engagement with the student identity. This chapter focuses the participants' experience of HE with a focus on 'becoming a student' (see also Barnett, 2007) related to the engagement in the learning process, the role of relationships intertwined with the development of the student, learner and occupational identity.

7.1 How are Apprentices prepared for the transition to HE?

Theories of situated learning and communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) suggest that individuals' experiences of learning are unique, varying according to specific contexts, relationships and situations. As such, the participants' experience HE in relation to

the multiple, interconnecting contexts of their lives, rather than only seeing them in the context of their discipline or institution. In understanding the former Apprentices' education and work histories we see that as individuals they are overwhelmingly different from each other; far more different than I might have anticipated. On one level, this is not surprising. However, research techniques which emphasise common themes tend to develop imagery of participants as members of groups with the suggestion that these groups can be adequately described and defined. Looking closely at the details of the narratives reminds us of the limits. For example, Tom and Liam are both 'working class' men who share similar backgrounds; both commenced A Levels after school, were successful in their Engineering Apprenticeship and came from families with a history of vocational education. However, the development of their possible selves and their engagement with HE learning experience is extremely different. For Tom, the academic elements of the HNC are a struggle, and he does not identify with the student identity; yet for Liam, his transition has been more fluid and he has embraced becoming a student. However, this engagement with the student identity must be recognised in the broader workplace context, for example, Liam moves into a 'white-collar' role becoming part of a community of graduate level colleagues. Tom, however, stays within his occupational craft working alongside colleagues without HE qualifications and who are indifferent to his achievements.

Some of the more hostile arguments levied against HE students with vocational qualifications is that they are deficient in the academic skills required to succeed resulting lower levels of retention and attainment (Connor and Little, 2005; Bailey and Bekhradnia, 2008; Hayward, 2008; Hayward *et al.*, 2008; Pring *et al.*, 2009). However, these discussions conflict with the experiences of the participants in this study who regarded their Apprenticeship and occupational experience as providing a firm preparation for HE. While they recognised they may lack certain academic skills (for example, examinations and referencing) they felt that their transferable skills (for example, time management, organisation, presentations, report writing, decision-making and self-motivation) as being invaluable to their becoming a student and their developing sense of self. More broadly, the socialisation into an occupational identity, with its underpinning knowledge, values and behaviours, and the contribution to the formulation of realisable possible selves, acted as both a motivational force and guide in their becoming. This is especially evident in the accounts of those combining work and study - Claire, Elizabeth, Jamie, Liam, Lucille, Nina, Paul, Rose, and Sarah whose HE courses aligned with their occupational identity. For example, Claire's Apprenticeship in Health and Social Care provided specialist preparation and underpinning knowledge and skills which helped her

transition to her nursing degree. Claire valued the Apprenticeship for developing her autonomy, preparing her for the practical elements of the programme, and preparing her for the emotional demands.

[The Apprenticeship] has been quite good preparation for the way that the learning works... The NVQ was very different to anything I had ever done before, I thought, this is very strange, and it took me quite a while to get. But it has been really good preparation for the way that a lot of stuff is done here...

I think that the communication skills that you develop to be able to go and talk to anybody, don't just come, you don't just walk in with them... You have to try and slot yourself in and make people get on board with you, and I think that doing [Apprenticeship] has, does set you up for that, very much so.

(Claire, first interview)

The participants' narratives highlight the levels of persistence, even in difficult times, with a focus on maximising the opportunity of HE study motivated by the possible selves that they viewed HE as unlocking. Yet, this determination and resilience to engage with their HE learning meant an initial period of adjustment in understanding what becoming a student would mean regarding academic study, their broader work and life.

The following section draws attention to the participants' increasing knowledge and understanding about the customs of HE learning – managing the realities of learning, practical strategies, and the development of critical skills which are significant in becoming HE students. HE study has not been smooth or without its challenges for the former Apprentices; with most reflecting on moments that threatened their developing learner identity by undermining their confidence in themselves. Such events were often related to perceived academic underachievement but were also influenced by broader elements of life and work. Time cuts across the participant's trajectory from the periphery towards the core (at least within their course), acknowledging the gradual process of accruing knowledge, skills and competencies and learning to become a HE student which involved the reconstructions to their learner identity in relation to these communities.

7.2 Engagement in learning and the academic practice of HE

The participants were engaged in various patterns of HE study including traditional full-time honours degrees, and flexible, part-time Foundation Degrees and HNC/Ds, most of which were vocationally-orientated. These aligned with the participants' occupational identity and led to

an engagement with others with professional backgrounds. Many of the participants were managing work and study, or placements and study, and as such were required to manage full timetables, multiple assessment tasks with private study and other commitments. Gethen, Jamie, Paul, Rose, Simon and Sarah had engaged in full-time, more traditional HE pathways that gave less explicit recognition to the value of vocational elements and invoked a different set of experiences, identities and practices.

Conceptualising HE students as legitimate peripheral participants in HE communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) aids our understanding of how students establish their own practice communities, recognising that there are shared practices across HE while acknowledging they may look significantly different between disciplines. Becoming full participants in the sociocultural practices of a community involves engaging with what being part of the community involves; what being a student means, how members talk, work, conduct their lives, how others interact with it, and the nature of collaboration (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.95). As such, academic practice plays a central role in the former Apprentices' movement from legitimate peripheral participants, learning from academic and student peers to becoming a student. For most participants, there was a clear journey as they move towards this core, yet their position within the HE institutional, course and student community varies significantly with some who remain at the periphery, either deliberately or by being excluded, from some practice communities, for example, Liam, Lucille, Nina and Samuel who by studying at a satellite site or part-time struggle to integrate with the institutional community. Students' experience HE through participation in the formal and informal practices of overlapping practice communities yet while the aim may be to become an integrated member, for some this is not achieved. This is further compounded by some participants experiencing conflict in their membership of HE while at the same maintaining their position in their workplace communities.

7.2.1 Engagement with pedagogy

Consistent with the participants' occupationally-related experience of learning, there is a preference for pedagogy that involves playing an active and contributory role in the learning process, such as group work and working with peer and academic industry professionals. Such methods of teaching and learning modes are also likely to encourage greater engagement with a practice community and support the formation of peer relationships as they encourage engagement in discussions and joint activities, peer-to-peer support, and the sharing of knowledge and information.

Participants studying vocationally-orientated HE programmes or those with close workplace associations, such as business, nursing, education and some sub-degree engineering suggest a learning culture that is more supportive of those coming from non-traditional backgrounds, thus facilitating a smoother transition. These programmes provided a greater synergy between the participants' occupational identity and HE teaching and learning; participants existing understanding of the sector and of the values, behaviours and language of the discipline gave a familiarity which contributed to the HE environment appearing less alien and giving the participants greater confidence in their voice. Importantly, being taught by academics who recognise the occupational experience of the HE cohort helped facilitate a connection between the spaces of HE and work (Eraut, 2009). Participants on such programmes describe learning which encouraged students to work together and to share their practice. This can be conceptualised as contributing to the active construction of practice communities and supporting becoming through the development of learner voice and confidence. As Lucille and Nina describe:

It's quite good to include all our different experiences, and our lecturers definitely encourage it because they love a good debate. I think because we are so different, our age ranges from myself who's the youngest at 19 up to over 50, so it means we've got those different life experiences as well, not just actually in practice, but how we all learn.

(Lucille, first interview)

You can say a lot of things and get a lot of answers from the lecturer like at that time. Whereas I think in, in my mind, if I went to like a university full-time with a lecture hall sort of style, then I wouldn't have that participation.

(Nina, second interview)

Such learning practices support a trajectory to fuller participation within the course practice community, it is an investment of themselves and allows the student both to contribute and be a resource for HE learning. Crossing the boundaries between HE and work is central to these participants relating their HE learning to practice (either in reality or reflections of previous practice) and understanding how the theoretical knowledge can improve their practice. Participants suggest a stronger connection to their academic studies when these could be more readily connected to the working environment:

Yeah, the theory is really good but, how does it work in practice? How does it work in

your practice?... There might be someone else in a nursery with the same age range, but they do it completely differently. That's quite nice because we are all working that you can get those debates going again.

(Lucille, first interview)

As participants progressed through HE, the increasing reliance on their own knowledge highlights the transition to becoming autonomous and independent with a greater understanding of their knowledge gaps with an associated view of seeing teaching as a supplement to self-directed study.

The research project has been a big daunting task; you don't get a lot of support from your tutor because you are literally supposed to go off by yourself and research your subject. So, it's a bit different from what I'm used to learning-wise.

(Elizabeth, second interview)

I think the reason why I hated the first year of university so much... It didn't have any meaning to me... I find I am enjoying myself more because you get a lot more free scope to do what you want.

(Simon, second interview)

Being proactive and taking responsibility for managing their learning is a significant aspect of what it means to be a HE student – part of the student identity. Lucille, for example, discusses aligning with the identity of the HE student as independent and autonomous as her course progressed:

I would rather now be in a group talking about something and then have time to go off and research it. I find that more rewarding like I've found a really good paper rather than someone just giving it to you on a plate... I learnt those skills more last year that you aren't just going to get stuff given to you on a plate.

(Lucille, second interview)

Furthermore, accepting personal limitations and acknowledging the need for support in specific areas of study was seen as being a responsible learner. Several participants acknowledge, that at times they required additional support and had the confidence to request help; Claire, Jamie, Gethen, Sarah and Mo all spoke of the role of central support services in helping them in aspects of their learning. The participants recognise that needing extra help was not a weakness but part of being persistent and responsible for their learning:

The support is there, sometimes you've got to go and look for it, but the support is there if you need it like the maths service... You've got to be persistent... Like with most things if you're not persistent you're not going to get to the end of it.

(Mo, second interview)

While these attitudes underpinned their learner identity and sense of feeling like an established student, these instances of requesting and receiving central support were from participants, who due to the full-time nature of their programme, had a greater connection to their broader institutional community.

7.2.2 The role of assessment and feedback

A further aspect of engaging in the academic practice connects to the relationship with feedback and assessment and its role in helping students understand their learning progression and make judgements about the development of their knowledge and understanding. At the beginning of HE, feedback concerning academic skills such as writing and referencing was highly valued as these academic conventions were unfamiliar. Receiving positive feedback was confidence-building, and many recalling the first piece of positive feedback as a turning point in their academic confidence:

When I was writing, and I really didn't know if I was doing the right thing and then when I got feedback, you know you can get feedback for x amount of words you've done, and she [tutor] gave me really positive feedback and said it's all really good. I then thought oh, ok I actually feel like I'm doing all right then.

(Claire, second interview)

Almost all the early participant interviews were dominated by assessment concerns and worry about failing to meet academic standards. This anxiety alleviated as the participants appreciated their strengths and came to accept, to a certain degree, areas of weaknesses. For example, Jamie, like others, was most anxious about the academic assessments but over time describes a growing self-confidence with the assessments but also an acceptance of being more comfortable with certain forms of assessment. Jamie's excerpt below mirrors that of others, that sheer motivation, hard work and increasing familiarity with examinations has supported his becoming:

I was nervous, but then, I knew my stuff. I read the question, and I answered the question. I mean the brain will store information if you practise it like so, I know that.

If you don't practise, you won't store that information. So, I did all right; I passed all my exams.

(Jamie, second interview)

For most participants, there was a clear preference for assessment linked to practice; with most both enjoying and excelling in work-related assessments that enabled them to demonstrate their deepening academic and occupational knowledge⁶⁹. Lucille and others made a secure connection between the nature of Apprenticeship learning and elements of their HE course revealing the significance of the participants' prior experiences in understanding the dynamic transitions they make within HE. Furthermore, reflection and critical thinking skills were recognised as central to becoming a successful HE student, with many acknowledging the importance of these skills in strengthening their professional practice:

It helps when you are doing your writing to be able to compare it to real life... I've actually seen how it happens and why it happens that way and I can think about it a little bit more in-depth... A lot of it is reflection, and how we've taken it in, so that's quite nice because when you are writing something, you are writing about stuff which has had an effect on the way that you work.

(Lucille, second interview)

Assessment judgements affect not only how the students saw their academic learning but affected their sense of becoming. Unsurprisingly, there were occasions when participants failed to meet their own standards; they did not achieve the grade desired or received negative feedback which was an obstruction in their developing learner identity. While these events caused disappointment, most participants talked of drawing on a mature, professional attitude to overcome obstructions; seeking clarification and using the experiences to improve. For example, Mo and Lucille discuss coping with failures:

I went through the process of speaking to my personal tutor about my scores... It was a kick in the teeth, and at first, it did bother me, and I sort of, it winds me up, but then I'm like "I can't change it, so I've got to learn from it and move on".

(Mo, second interview)

⁶⁹ It should be noted that these assessment preferences were less noticeable in the accounts of Gethen and Mo, who were studying HE programmes which did not align with their Apprenticeship.

Furthermore, positive relationships with academics were significant in enabling the participants to draw upon the communities shared knowledge both to support their studies and the construction of a secure learner identity. Lucille's narrative, which is reflective of others, illustrates the influence of her tutors:

The most hard-hitting point was my essay before last. I got it back and it was the really lovely lecturer, but she sat us all down and said none of you are ready for second year, your writing sounds the same as before, and you aren't reading enough. That did make me think I do need to read some more journals, more academic writing rather than just relying on some of the key authors.

(Lucille, second interview)

However, there was an inherent tension and frustration regarding assessments processes. Practice-linked assessment was viewed as supporting engagement in the assessment process, yet a significant criticism was the balance in style of assessment with many identifying a conflict in accepting individuals with diverse educational experiences, yet modes of assessment failed to recognise the diversity in background. Most participants discussed choosing HE programmes which were vocationally-related, ultimately aimed at developing professional practice and reinforcing occupational identity, but found the assessment processes did not reflect this:

They were happy to take me in recognising I had not done any further education, but then they would assess me in their most academic format, do you know what I mean... They could have set up a real-life environment, set a project, see if I come through - that would have been a more accurate assessment.

(Jamie, third interview)

An integral aspect of becoming is understanding the norms and values of the institution, with the comprehension of assessment procedures forming part of this. While there are often sound pedagogical reasons for abstract and theoretical assessment processes, these may not be fully understood by the student body. Equally, HE must also accept that engaging non-traditional students extends beyond admitting entry, it includes understanding and responding to student needs regarding curriculum and assessment. The participants' frustrations are not related to their inability to perform in academic assessment but connected to feelings of being undervalued. Greater flexibility or responsiveness in assessment procedures may ensure greater mutual support between students and reinforce the positive features of a diverse

student body.

7.2.3 The development of critical thinking and theoretical knowledge

The participants' narratives as they progress through their HE studies emphasise learning as linked to understanding; making sense of theoretical ideas and concepts by relating to previous knowledge and current practice and thereby giving it personal meaning. Recognising the process by which the participants became successful HE students is not isolated from their Apprenticeship and professional work experiences. The participants expected the opportunity for discussion and enjoyed sharing personal and professional experiences as an integral component of their learning. Through these learning experiences, they came to accept and appreciate that knowledge could be open to different interpretations based on one's experiences and practice.

All of the participants stressed a higher level of comfort in the practical elements or where they could see that learning had a practical application, such as the application of theory in the workplace. At the start of the programmes, many of the participants discussed feeling like the theoretical understanding was disconnected from practice and more challenging to engage with yet as their course progressed they were able to create more explicit links between their developing theoretical knowledge and practice, frequently acknowledging the role of placements, work experience or work-related assessments. As Samuel and Sarah explain:

I can bring examples, I read the theory and then think I've already done that. It kind of puts a title to what you've done – the theory to what you've done... There is a lot of synergy because of the subject content.

(Samuel, second interview)

I thought "Oh yeah, there's this physics law, the biomechanical law of this," and if you do this I think that would help it, and then you get higher out of the water. From when I was swimming, I've kind of understood the way the body works, and how you can adapt it and change it slightly to benefit you, so I can apply that to my coaching quite well.

(Sarah, first interview)

Programmes with placements, like Sarah and Claire, appeared to accelerate the process of personal development; a process of becoming as they appreciated the challenges of the specific workplace environment. For those situated within the workplace, there was an

enhancement in learning disposition and a more significant interest in their studies when the participants could more easily connect these to the working environment. Yet, by the final interview, there was a growing comfort with theoretical learning, recognising knowledge as a continuum with disconnected, factual information at one end and a more connected, interpretative knowledge at the other (Marton and Säljö, 1976). Furthermore, there was growing confidence in questioning and viewing knowledge as subject to interpretation; as such participants became more confident in contributing their own ideas and experiences. Fundamentally, many of the narratives suggest a desire for knowledge which will improve their professional practice and career outcomes yet this is likely as the experiences presented here are from a group who have predominantly opted for HE programmes which align with their Apprenticeship and occupational identity and are viewed as providing a platform for progression within the field.

7.3 The influence of support networks, future selves and developing identities in becoming a HE student

If we recognise that learning is a social activity, it seems only natural that to be a successful learner requires a sense of social integration – a sense of belonging and an alignment between the self and environment, coupled with a confidence in one’s contribution to the learning activity. A person’s identity may be nurtured but also questioned by social relationships with relationships reinforcing notions of belonging to a community. The participants’ networks provided a source of support, encouragement and protection in difficult times, both into and throughout their HE studies. While there was a constancy in personal and often workplace networks, newer HE-facilitated relationships which had grown predominantly through HE programmes of study were also viewed as significant. This final section focuses on the participants’ discussions around support systems with three factors emerging: relationship with networks and peers, the role of occupational identity and the personal motivation provided through the vision of their future selves.

7.3.1 Relationships with networks and peers

Participants on smaller programmes (mostly, although not exclusively, those studying part-time or in FE), were more likely to reflect on developing peer relationships with those perceived as sharing similar professional values and experiences. As discussed in Section 7.2.2, an aspect of these relationships concerned a movement from the periphery of the course community of practice and played a vital part in helping integrate the participants into the

world of HE. Many of the participants studying part-time talked about benefitting from the knowledge, skills and capabilities of the peers who came from a range of professional backgrounds and how this encouraged a broader understanding of their learning. For example, Lucille discussed the relationships with her course peers as helping sustain her motivation and engagement through difficult patches:

There's three of us who will meet before lectures, and it works really well because we bounce ideas off each other and all three of us have a clear role that we want to do after we finish our degree... We are all working together to try and do the best that we can.

(Lucille, second interview)

Friendships with fellow students also played a significant role in the participants' well-being and a sense of belonging to the learning environment, summarised by Sarah at the end of her second year:

It's really good actually because everyone on our course gets on really, really well, there's no proper divide... Obviously in a course where it's quite practical, and you've got to practice on each other and stuff... But now we're all so close we're like, "It's fine, just get on with it"... So everyone takes the advantage and just gets on with it really.

(Sarah, second interview)

Samuel, who studied for his degree through distance learning, slowly built up a network with course peers meaning that over time he found the experience less isolating than he first anticipated distance learning might be:

When I first started as an Apprentice, she worked in the legal section. We met there, and it just turned out that we were starting exactly the same course and we've done it ever since. The last four years we've studied together, it's just luck really.

(Samuel, third interview)

The participants' narratives of their HE experience are interspersed with accounts of the support being derived from the groups they had formed and participated in. These groups were crucial locations for learning, meaning and identity - groups that helped the participants develop a sense of themselves as students. These groups facilitated the sharing of information, resources and strategies for survival, Wenger (1998, p.47) suggests that these are the "tacit

conventions, subtle cues, untold rules of thumb” that members of practice communities take on as they move from the novice to the proficient.

However, the participants’ movement from the periphery also rests on the nature of their relationships within institutional HE communities. For participants like Elizabeth, Liam, Lucille, Lucy, Nina, Samuel and Tom, who combined work with study⁷⁰, their physical engagement with the HE setting was time-constrained which resulted in the participants demanding more from their limited course and institutional interactions. They valued the opportunity to interact with peers and academics as this offered a sense of being part of a supportive community, encouraged active participation and helped develop personal relationships. It is this mutual engagement in the practice community that helps define the community (Wenger, 1998). Students with different experiences, backgrounds and expectations who may or may not agree, or like each other, or have little in common must find ways to work together. This demonstrates the temporal dimension of building relationships, participating in learning communities, and ultimately to progress towards building a secure student identity (even if not all the participants view themselves as students in a traditional sense) which are central aspects in the process of becoming:

There’s only 20 of us, and we’re usually in small classrooms and it’s always the same people like we all get on really well, we all know each other really well.

(Sarah, second interview)

[When] we go into our lectures we all discuss various things, and other people have different opinions because they are all from different walks of life.

(Samuel, second interview)

The supportive element also extended to a learning culture where participants felt their contributions were valued. Participants talked about being cautious about voicing their opinions due to worries about being wrong, but as time progressed accounts changed, and the participants felt more secure in the HE environment which could be linked to closer relationships and a stronger sense of their position and voice within HE. The exceptions here are Rose and Simon, whose narratives highlight the struggles in locating their voice, at least publicly, in the HE community. In addition, interactions with academics play a crucial role in becoming, with the input of industry professionals helping to situate learning in the

⁷⁰ This might be full or part-time study but for whom the contact time with the HE setting was limited.

participants' work biography, acknowledged the value of their experience, and validated the aspect of HE participation which for many was to strengthen their occupational identity. As Sarah suggests in her second interview, it is "really good to be able to implement within our practice and doing a lot of reflection to see how we could improve our practice."

A culmination of becoming HE students and a movement from the periphery of the community is further evidenced by the complexities of peer-to-peer relations and a perceived responsibility to contribute to the course community. Several participants discussed assuming a role of helping others - Jamie, Lucille, Mo and Samuel all discussed how they had taken on the role of an informal mentor helping struggling students - As Jamie discusses:

I help all the kids in the class, well some of them are other students some of them are young, some are older than me but less experienced. So, I help them, I tell them, and some of them come to me and ask me like what's does this mean and I just say what I think.

(Jamie, second interview)

They view this as being a responsible learner but also reciprocating the support they had been given during the early stages of their HE programme. This is a signifier of a movement towards fuller participation in the course community, through greater participation and increased knowledge of academic practice which supports the construction of a student identity.

However, while this may signify a higher level of participation in the course practice community, there is little evidence that suggests that the participants felt belonging to the broader HE community. The exclusion to this is Mo, Gethen and Sarah, and to some extent Jamie, whose journeys to becoming and their attachment to their institution appear stronger.

However, there was also a level of dejection in many of the participants' narratives as they reflected on feeling like they had missed out on the social elements and new friendships of being a student due to practical constraints such as the work responsibilities, time and distance. Participants recognised the importance of HE peers in their support networks, but it was apparent these were primarily confined to course peers due to a lack of exposure to students from across the institution. As the participants moved through their courses, those studying part-time (or finding their involvement with the institution was limited due to work placements) talked of feeling isolated from their HE institution with little time for social activities. Several made frequent reference to a lack of social interactions with fellow students, a lack of involvement in extra-curricular activities and missing out on social experiences which

they perceived to be a significant aspect of student identity. For several participants, they had been influenced by media-led portrayals of students yet for several, particularly those whose school peers had progressed to traditional three-year degrees, they were directly related this to their understanding of their peers' experiences, as Elizabeth outlines:

It makes me a bit jealous that all my friends have new friends... I've also got a few friends back home still, but it's not like the community they've got at university. They've made friends for life there whereas I missed out on opportunity... It's hard to feel like a student when you work full time because you don't get time off to go and work in the library or study leave or just Easter holidays or anything like that. There is definitely a perception of what students are like and there's not necessarily a good perception by - like certain people. They're not perceived to be good members of society.

(Elizabeth, third interview)

Lave and Wenger (1991, p.36) recognise peripherality can be empowering when individuals move towards more intensive participation. However, it can also be disempowering when an individual is kept from participating more fully. In response to this disconnect, long-standing networks continued to be a primary source of support; participants talked of networks of influence providing emotional, practical, and, in some cases, academic support with the nature of support reflecting the strength of network ties. For Claire, the only parent in the study, her mother frequently helped with childcare and for others, who were combining study and employment, parents often just helped ease the daily stresses of housework enabling more time for study. Undoubtedly, the apparently minor interventions were critical in sustaining the participants through some significant moments.

Furthermore, positive relationships with academics were significant in enabling the participants to draw upon the communities shared knowledge both to support their studies and the construction of a secure learner identity. However, the participants' narratives reflected a significant variation in the relationships with academics; many tutors supported the development of secure identities by offering reassurance, guidance and a willingness to help. Conversely, others discussed tutors who were remote, uninterested and unwilling to respond to appeals for advice. In general terms, these different levels of student-tutor interaction reflected a divide between college-based sub-degree and university-based degree provision. This is perhaps to be expected given that tutors teaching on college-based provision often have smaller cohorts with reliance on fewer members of a teaching team. This is in contrast

with university-based programmes where participants described being part of larger cohorts and feeling more anonymous within the course and institutional structure. However, the most significant student-tutor relationships were often happenstance rather than institutionally arranged. For example, Jamie develops a strong connection with a course technician who becomes a source of personal and academic support. More frequently participants spoke of drawing on the resource of their student peers, sharing ideas and learning from others on their course. As discussed previously, this is an aspect of mutual engagement in a practice community - of feeling a sense of belonging to a group and having a voice, but also of having a shared repertoire - encouraging others' contributions, reacting positively and maintaining relationships (Wenger, 1998). Asking others for help and support is part of this shared repertoire and highlights a willingness to admit to the need for help. For the part-time students, peer-led social media was a means of facilitating group interaction and connecting an often-disparate group of students. While these participants struggled to identify with the student identity, online means of communicating enhanced identification with course practice community, as Nina discusses:

We've got a [social media] feed running... We all sort of are able to support ourselves a bit more and not so much rely on the lecturer who sort of - it feels like we sort of come into our own a little bit.

(Nina, second interview)

7.3.2 Vision of future possible selves

However, it was not just individuals who helped sustained the participants but also their personal motivation constructed through their possible future selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986). At the end of every interview they were asked about their future - where they see themselves, the vision for their future career, and whether they had a strategy to achieve these goals. Correspondingly, the future selves presented by the participants lie within the domains of education and career; as instrumental notions have helped define the participants' engagement with HE it is unsurprisingly then that career-orientated future selves are most dominant. Markus and Nurius (1986) present possible selves as inspiring and legitimising action, facilitating the development and implementation of plans to move towards, or away from, the envisioned possible self. In elaborate versions, these selves may depict various abilities, qualities, traits and properties that the self does not yet possess but may need to acquire in order to achieve the future desirable self. As such, a possible self may become a bridge between the current and ideal self, creating a link between the present and the future

(Markus and Ruvolo, 1989). Possible selves are not merely a cognitive representation of the self (for example, to become an engineer) but provide more complex imagery of a specific future situation. Erikson (2007) views this as giving more meaning to life tasks and involving a plan of how to reach that desired self. As discussed in Section 3.1.1 possible selves are not confined to the projections of whom they may like to become but also encompasses the selves who they do not want to become.

Most of the participants had entered HE with the goal of achieving the qualification and using this to access a professional career, which was often more elaborate than merely the career but involved a sense how that would enable them to be the selves they want to become. For most, the notions around this professional career were personalised, reflective of personal values and included imagery of an employer, work location and what one's life may look like as a result. Having this detailed future self was frequently cited as a motivating force when things got difficult as it gave meaning to current actions in light of what the participants hoped for (Markus and Nurius, 1986), as illustrated by Jamie and John:

Memories of rainy days on the building site. I don't want to do that for the whole of my life. [I'm] not thinking about now, or next year, or five years, I'm thinking far the bigger picture like my life work, I want to achieve a lot, you know, I've got big dreams.

(Jamie, second interview)

It gave me some sort of direction because a lot of people would just go uni because it is the thing to do, that is the reason why [they] went to college and went to Uni. I know what I want to do afterwards... I know what I want to be doing and I think it is a sad fact that I don't think a lot of university students know exactly what they want to do and to have that grounding is very useful I would say.

(Simon, second interview)

As Jamie goes on to discuss, his motivations are driven by having experienced the physical demands of labouring in the construction sector. He alludes to both the future possible self as the hoped for self but also the feared self and the future he is striving to avoid which he feels sets him apart from fellow students. Having a clear vision of a post-graduation future and this desirable future self was highly motivating, particularly during times of pressure.

I think that many people who come to uni, from college or 6th form, haven't made those decisions. They haven't had a taste of what the other option is.

(Jamie, first interview)

Many of the participants were acutely aware of the importance of gaining a 'good' grade which for many was an Upper Second Class or equivalent. The perception was that this grade would offer the greatest currency in the graduate employment market, but would also be reflective of the effort (and for some, the personal cost they had incurred) in committing to their studies:

It's got to be a 2:1 at least, I was hoping for a 1st... I mean and I'm at uni five days a week, well seven days a week, I've been at uni seven days a week since January, and some weeks I've been on site during the day and at uni at night. So, I'm working hard for it.

(Jamie, second interview)

I was really, really happy, but at the same time, it almost justified why I put that much time into it. I put a lot of time into it, and it was like, well, thank god, it was worth it. If I got a 2.2, I would have been like, oh, what's the point?

(Nina, second interview)

It's been such a long thing, that's why I just think I've wasted time and money if I don't get a 2:1 or above. In law, you need a 2:1 or above to get anywhere... I would feel like I've let myself down if I didn't... I've paid for all this myself.

(Samuel, second interview)

Furthermore, there was also an emotional motivation to achieve a strong academic grade relating to how the participants felt they are perceived due to having been an Apprentice; being conscious that Apprenticeships are seen, by some, as followed by individuals who are less academic (Thompson, 2009). As such, they viewed their achievements within HE as challenging this negative stereotype. As Lucille discusses:

I'm more ambitious because when I did my Apprenticeship, it was like I said, it was like the dumb route to take and now I am doing quite well in my degree, so I believe in myself a little bit more. I never thought I could get a 2:1 so now I want to get a first and just push myself to that. It's allowed me to think I'm not that stupid, I've done an Apprenticeship but I'm all right because I'm doing well in degree, so it's proving everyone wrong again.

(Lucille, second interview)

7.3.3 The connection to occupational identity

The participants who were combining employment and part-time study discussed the strengthening of their workplace networks during the timeframe of HE participation, with some of these relationships offering a type of support which was aligned to mentoring. Only Lucille was following a programme that was categorised as work-based learning, yet Samuel, Nina, Elizabeth and Lucy all discussed informal mentors. One benefit of this workplace support is being encouraged to integrate their HE knowledge into their work role, but there is also the personal advantage in being regarded in the workplace as taking control over learning and being seen as aspiring to progress:

My boss is one of the best bosses I have had, he's an incredible guy and he, I can have the same conversation that I'm having with you, you can just have a casual chat... I never thought it would, but even the directors they see the potential in me.

(Samuel, third interview)

It goes back to the feeling that he is showing a huge amount of ambition but also hard graft and tenacity in terms of improving his career prospects and showing not only to this organisation but external organisations his ability and interest to work and that can only help him in career ambitions.

(Nick Hove, Samuel's Manager)

As has been discussed, many of the participants HE programmes involved work placements or aligned to their current or recent employment experiences with the work-related elements being viewed as fundamental to making sense of the academic learning but reciprocally academic theory being viewed as strengthening workplace practice. An illustration is Lucille, who was promoted to Deputy Manager of a pre-school giving her a higher level of responsibility to both challenge and change practice within the setting. The Manager, who was also studying for a HE qualification, was an understanding work colleague who was enthusiastic about developing workplace practice and helped influence the workplace culture to be more amenable to new ideas and practice while encouraging staff to take responsibility and ownership for improving practice. As Lucille notes in her final interview "the learning culture of HE has influenced our workplace culture".

This aspect of influencing workplace culture was indicated in other accounts. Liam's Apprenticeship was restrictive regarding post-Apprenticeship opportunities, with him moving

into an office-based role after finding limited progression within his department. While this is a positive personal outcome, his narrative highlights becoming a role model for colleagues to realise there are progression opportunities. Liam describes pioneering progression to a HE study within his workplace:

Since I left [the shop floor] two people have gone onto the HNC. I think they have seen that there is a route for that. I don't remember anyone doing that route before me.

(Liam, second interview)

In contrast, Nina's workplace experience has been very different; despite gaining an Upper Second-Class Honours degree, she feels like she is not recognised as a graduate. While her company supported her degree, she has not received the same recognition (nor remuneration) as colleagues have who were employed as graduates from traditional routes through HE. Nina has expressed an interest in progressing through the organisation's graduate scheme but has been overlooked, and is frustrated with the organisation's stance on personal development:

I think it is going to be intriguing to see how the company uses [my degree and experience] because I'm quite committed... They'll bring in these graduates that have got no work experience but give them a massive pay packet and loads of exposure... Obviously, we need graduates, for sure, to bring in the talent, but God, see what talent you've got inside first.

(Nina, second interview)

The narratives also highlight the transformative nature of HE; how the participants drew on their own personal and occupational identity to become confident and integral members of their course community. These concepts are essential, reminding us of the importance of widening participation and the transformative power of HE on individuals personal, social and professional lives. Claire's narrative embodies the sense of the transformative nature of HE and how it has changed her outlook on a personal and professional level.

I feel more confident in my abilities to do things that I thought I wouldn't be able to do and that just has impacted generally on me feeling that actually I can do that because before I would be "oh I don't like it, I'm not doing it." It's the kind of person I've always been. If I don't like and it makes me uncomfortable, then I don't want to do it... So just doing things like that and knowing that I can actually do it has made me

feel like I can do other things.

(Claire, second interview)

There was a definite difference regarding the transformative aspects of those participants who were combining work and study and those who were studying full-time. Those blending work and study were less prone to talk about HE as a personally transformative experience referring instead to their professional knowledge and status. Lucy highlights that in her professional sphere entering work at a relatively young age had the most significant impact on her confidence with HE offering her greater professional recognition within the workplace:

I'm not sure how much it [university] affected my confidence because I'd already done - the scary bit was starting work at 18... It [university] gave me a lot more confidence in myself from a technical point of view. Also, a lot more confidence speaking to people externally to the business because of the letters and because people knew that you knew what you were talking about because you had the education to back it up.

(Lucy, third interview)

7.3.4 The conflict in developing identities

The HE context is itself a transitional space; while the student identity has a definite status – often seen as one of privilege – for many of the participants there is a sense that it is a non-identity because its value lies in what it can offer as an outcome rather than in its present. Mo, Gethen and Sarah, were more invested in the student identity having thought about what it meant to be a student but also through their general understanding of the demands and expectations of HE due to their family and social contexts. For example, when Gethen was asked about whether he felt at ease with the student identity, he responds:

I think the stereotype for older people is students just lay all day doing nothing and stuff. But I'm quite happy. I'm not - I don't really particularly dwell on it much to be honest but I suppose I'd say I'm quite comfortable with it, yeah.

(Gethen, second interview)

However, most of the participants discussed views about 'archetypal' students and in feeling different from these depictions only partially engage with the student identity and their narratives conflict with the idealised model of student life (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003). Instead, they balance the student identity with their various roles outside their HE programme:

employee, skilled practitioner, colleague, partner, as well as others:

The typical party all the time students, that's not me, I don't see myself as that kind of student. I haven't been out; I haven't been to the pub, I haven't been to a club, or anything related to that this year, this semester or last semester... I keep a job mentality, you know. This is all work to me; this is the beginning of my career.

(Jamie, second interview)

I felt like a worker... It was so closely linked to the business and linked to what my job - sort of linked it in with my job if that makes sense. It became like a job. That's how it ended up.

(Elizabeth, third interview)

Even the participants, like Jamie, who have moved away from their workplace are reluctant to exchange their occupational identity (and status) for that of being a student. This professional mindset continues in the participants approach to their studies, even the full-time students - Claire, Gethen, Jamie, Mo, Paul and Sarah - all discussed planning their studies like a job which highlights a different nuance in the commitment to being a student:

I'm just that guy that puts the work in, and you can check the register, I've been here every lecture, everything's in on time, I'm in on time, I do the work.

(Jamie, second interview)

However, in many of the participants' narratives (those of the full-time students exhibit less), there is a conflict and tension between occupational identity and student identity. The former Apprentices appear reluctant to transfer their identity status from a worker to student. This reluctance may be because the perceived privilege of being a skilled worker offers a position within the organisational hierarchy which conflicts with the media-led images of being a HE student. Samuel, as well as others, discuss a reluctance to acknowledge their student status within his workplace perceiving their occupational status to be akin to graduate level. Acknowledging they had not yet completed HE study undermines the status they have worked hard to achieve:

They are more shocked when I say I'm doing a law degree, they often say have you not already got a degree?... They see the professional side of me and assume I've already got there... Some of the people I have to deal with internally, it's not that they wouldn't respect you, but they wouldn't see you in the same way, so I kind of put on

that image.

(Samuel, third interview)

This excerpt suggests that the status of being a student within the workplace may not be compatible with being perceived as competent in their job role (Boud and Solomon, 2003). Whereas an occupational identity aligns with being autonomous, conscientious and mature that of the student identity is unfinished, dependent and potentially in deficit (Askham, 2008).

7.4 Conclusions

Studying in HE requires students to be their own agents; to develop their own interpretations, conclusions and actions meaning and become independent, autonomous learners as having to “reach into themselves and draw something out” (Barnett, 2007, p.34). The former Apprentices drew on their significant occupational skills and competencies to help make sense of their academic learning, to balance their HE commitments and responsibilities and to ensure they met their own high standards.

Being able to create the link between academic learning and workplace practice supported personal development; the process of ‘becoming’ as the disposition to learn developed (Bloemer and Hodkinson, 1999, 2002) which was coupled with growing confidence and greater involvement in the learning experience. However, it is clear from the narratives that the process of becoming was not always smooth; it was a learning journey with setbacks (often due to perceived underachievement) and disengagement (such as when working life took precedence). The negotiation of different roles serves as a reminder that for many of these participants becoming a student cannot be disconnected from their other identities, particularly those related to work.

The sometimes-reciprocal support from peers was a recurring subject; for those following traditional full-time programmes it was a central issue while for the part-time students who were forced to be self-reliant, it was discussed more fleetingly and in relation to its absence. The peer support networks that were discussed, for example, by Claire, Jamie, Lucille, Mo and Sarah were often related to academic success, to sustaining engagement and to being part of a practice community. I would argue that, in general, the former Apprentices give a greater priority to reaching (and/or remaining) at the core of their workplace community which they balanced with a movement towards the core of the course community rather than towards the core of the wider HE community.

Furthermore, the data suggest that most participants never fully identify with the student identity, at least in the traditional youth-orientated sense, instead finding a greater synergy with an identity which reflects their occupational values and how they want to be perceived by others. This is reflective of Holmes (2013) perception that the student identity is emergent, explaining that "to be successful, an individual must become a graduate" (ibid., p.550).

Chapter 8. Discussion and Conclusion

Over the early stages of this study I became critical of notions of progression that suggest linear, institutionally sequenced pathways or normative trajectories into and through HE which I felt fail to reflect the complexity of HE participation for former Apprentices. The data generated through the interviews with former Apprentices and their social networks provide a rich insight into the socially and occupationally embedded nature of educational participation. The (re)storying of narratives further guided the focus towards the former Apprentices' individual and nuanced learning careers, situating them within personal and collective aspects of learning participation. This is an original study in an under-researched field; while there are peer-reviewed articles focused on Apprentices' experiences of progressing to HE (Dismore, 2014a, 2014b, 2016), there are no longitudinal research studies that have employed a narrative, social network approach. This thesis presents five former Apprentices' personal and social network accounts together with a thematic analysis of all sixteen participants; plotting their journey into and through HE, identifying their motivations for progression, their experience of HE and the impact on their occupational, learner and student identity. The literature on Apprentice participation in HE is limited and forms a minor part of the broader body of literature in the fields of vocational, post-compulsory and widening participation research. However, there is much to be understood about former Apprentices who progress into the HE system, such as the role and influence of their social networks and the impact of HE on learner and occupational identity.

This chapter is structured in several connected but discrete sections. I make space in the first part to reflect on the analyses made in Chapters Five, Six and Seven and consider the limitations of this study. This is a re-engagement with the epistemological and ethical perspectives I hold and addresses the choices I made in representing participants' lives and the knowledge claims I make. The second part brings together the findings and considers them in relation to the research questions posed in Chapter One, considering how former Apprentices engage with HE and the impact of this engagement. Following this, I discuss my contribution to knowledge and the implications for policy and future studies.

8.1 Reflecting on analysis and limitations of the study

I made the decision to start this chapter as a response to some of the ethical and epistemological questions raised in Chapter Four. I have purposefully created this space between my analyses, and the formal discussion of the knowledge claims to clarify some of my

decision-making and biases, interrupting my 'ventriloquism' (Fine, 1992) and exploring some of the problematical aspects of this study that may otherwise be obscured. The representations I make throughout this thesis can only ever be partial and the analyses tentative as there is not the space to attempt to recapture lives as they were lived (Bruner, 1986; Sikes, 2010). Correspondingly, I believe it is important to discuss what is absent from my representations. I have sought to be critical and reflexive throughout the analysis and writing. To understand my role and place in the participants' accounts, to recognise a preference for certain interpretations and what action I took in these circumstances. In choosing participant narratives and excerpts for inclusion I have taken their voices and re-routed them through an academic dialogue, telling their stories through my privileged position as a researcher. I am in agreement with Sikes (2010) that as researchers we must take responsibility for our interpretations as they make claims to present legitimate and authentic accounts of peoples' lives. It would be impossible to have written this thesis if the participants had not willingly given me access to their (partial) stories and my role is to respectfully represent these, recognising the importance of language and context.

In the case of one participant, Simon whose voice is included in the thematic analysis, I made some ethically based decisions both regarding the interview topics and inclusion in the social network approach. Simon disclosed in our first interview that he had become estranged from his family aged only sixteen and lived in hostel accommodation during his post-16 study. While he appeared comfortable talking about his living arrangements, he seemed to view the questions about his childhood, school experience and family relationships as intrusive. During our first encounter, recognising the reluctance to respond I made the conscious decision not to pursue this line of questions, giving Simon the space to narrate his story on his terms. I decided that I could return to some of the themes about family and school experiences in subsequent interviews once I had established greater trust and rapport. However, listening to the recording of the first interview I reflected on his resistance to discussing his family situation, he diverted questions and talked more broadly about growing up in a deprived community. Farrugia (2013) suggests research interactions have the potential for symbolic violence, reproducing the suffering and stigma associated with the dominant discourses used to describe youth homelessness, suggesting that interviewees might interpret questions as 'morally loaded judgements' (Ibid., 2013, p.117). My decision not to invite Simon to participate in the network aspect was not taken lightly; it was taken out of respect while acknowledging it sits on the boundaries of silencing and voice, othering and empathy (Lather, 2009).

Perfect research does not exist (Griffiths, 1998) and this study has been framed by the significant policy change in the field of Apprenticeships with implications for the future progression of former Apprentices. I have sought to ensure that this work has been rigorous and informed, and by acknowledging my own circumstances and bias I have been reflective in considering the impact it may have on analysis and interpretation. In line with my epistemological perspective (see Section 4.1), my intention has been to give insight into the experience of former Apprentices in their journeys into and through HE. I acknowledge that the limited number of participants in the study restricts the nature and type of observations that can be made, yet these observations are highly detailed due to the data achieved through the longitudinal network approach. A key strength is the study's longitudinal nature and a sampling approach that achieved a broad demographic and educational profile thus avoiding a homogenous group drawn exclusively from specific programmes or institutions. The aim was not generalisation but rather authenticity and credibility as measures of quality (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005); the narrative approach, grounding analysis in the data and seeking the views of broader networks further helps to enhance the findings credibility and authenticity.

In several ways, the sample impacted both by self-selection bias in the former Apprentices volunteering to participate and also in their willingness to involve their networks. A common theme in why the former Apprentices had responded to the request was due to an eagerness to raise awareness about Apprenticeships as a pathway to HE. One may assume that this interest in telling their story is driven, in part, by their perceptions of being a success story. Furthermore, as the first interview took place towards the end of the first year of HE, this may have skewed the sample towards those had made a successful transition to HE⁷¹, rather than those who commenced and subsequently withdrew. One then might naturally assume there are voices which are not present in the thesis - the individuals who started or wanted to start a HE programme but whose employers were unsupportive or obstructive, or those with family responsibilities who found studying in combination with work and childcare too difficult. There may be other voices as well, individuals who wanted to study in HE only to find the teaching timetable was not compatible with their working lives or individuals who were studying in HE but who struggled with the work and did not want to speak up. I do not make any claims to represent these voices, but I acknowledge they may exist within this heterogeneous group. Therefore, it may be beneficial to seek to study the experiences of former Apprentices who commence HE study but withdraw, to understand the social, educational and structural

⁷¹ As discussed in Section 2.3.1 vocational entrants are more likely to withdraw during the first year, but there is little difference in completion rates (Round, Brownless and Rout, 2012).

influences that lead to non-continuation. However, to be able to do so would require a more certain means of identifying and contacting students with an Apprenticeship background in the first instance (see Section 4.3.1 for a fuller discussion around the challenges in obtaining a sample).

8.2 Why were the case studies significant?

The network cases presented in this thesis involve different pathways and experiences in progressing to HE and the lived experiences of former Apprentices who successfully navigate the complexity of vocational progression to become HE students. Some of the participants left employment to commence full-time study while others combined work and study with the case studies reflecting this blend of experience. Jamie left his bricklaying employment to study full-time but returned to work with his previous employer during his academic breaks. Lucy remained in the workplace and her HE studies were financially supported by her employer. Mo was released from his Apprenticeship and started a full-time Foundation Year, with his family experiences pointing to HE as the next logical step. Samuel combined HE study with full-time employment, self-funding his HE study with his employer providing *ad hoc* support through intermittent study days. Finally, Rose's Apprenticeship was time-served but developed her self-confidence and aspirations to return to her HE programme to complete her degree. For Lucy and Samuel, who remained in employment (although Samuel moved employers during his HE study), their employers wielded significant power in enabling, financially and practically, a successful HE experience. Lucy had repeatedly presented the details of the degree course for approval to study, offering to take unpaid leave to cover the study hours. Finally, her employer conceded to support her financially, but without the encouragement of her workplace mentor, Lucy could have easily abandoned this aspiration.

All of the participants generously shared their stories with both the personal and network narratives providing an insight into both the fragility and endurance of the learning careers of former Apprentices who make the journey to HE (Bloomer, 1997; Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000b; 2002). The narratives reflect shared and individual experiences, with participants choosing to impart stories based on aspects of their lives that they considered significant. Rose shared a great deal of her personal life and emotions with me, in what felt like an attempt to aid her reflection and make meaning of her education and career decisions, perhaps wanting me to understand the difficulties she had in making sense of her future. Samuel's and Lucille's accounts focused on their financial concerns and aspirations for financial security as these were pivotal to their decisions while Jamie's and Lucy's focused on the centrality of their

occupational identities as a motivational force.

Becoming a student is a gradual, continuous process, intertwined with change and adaptation both to HE study and broader working life. It is not an abstract undertaking but interwoven with identity, context and experience. The narratives presented in this thesis are relevant to understanding the longitudinal dynamic learning journeys of former Apprentices. For example, Jamie and Lucille enjoyed their studies, and both graduated with an Upper Second-Class degree. However, during Jamie's first year he discussed some of the discouraging peer relations he had formed with other students which had impacted on becoming a student while Lucille discussed the damaging relationship with her workplace manager. If I had only interviewed these participants in the first year of HE study, I would have drawn very different conclusions than those presented here. The subsequent interviews acknowledged how the changing educational and workplace circumstances had contributed to their success. For example, the friendships Jamie subsequently fostered helped him to develop a more positive outlook:

Luckily, I spoke to the right person, and he showed me friendship, it was nice of him and he's a really good friend of mine now... I would say that I'm a different person now, having been to university. Yeah, it's changed my views, I would give my time to anyone now.

(Jamie, first interview)

While a new manager in Lucille's workplace, who was also studying part-time in HE, presented a more significant opportunity to embed her HE learning within her workplace, realising the role of expert practitioner at the core of the practice community and in doing so contribute to new workplace practices.

By narratively interviewing each former Apprentice several times⁷², I provided opportunities for the participants to explore how their occupational, learner and student identity developed over time with attention towards what they viewed as significant. This gave me access to unabridged accounts of their HE experiences and to gain a unique insight into what influenced their perceptions and beliefs and their ongoing transitions. These experiences and therefore the stories of experience were not static, but an ongoing process of 'becoming', of forming a learner identity through the learning process, as the learning becomes part of them. As such,

⁷² The aim was to interview each participant three times although due to time constraints some participants were only interviewed twice.

as the participants moved forward in their studies and, for some, upwards in their careers, their transitions were not only a change process but also transfer to a new identity (Ecclestone *et al.*, 2010). By allowing the interviews to be led by the participant, I considered that I had gained a more authentic insight into their lives and an understanding of what it was to become a student.

8.3 Utilising the lens of Archer's approaches to reflexivity

In undertaking this study, I wanted to understand the complexities and nuances of the participants' decision-making. How Lucy, Samuel and Simon who by their own definition were high achievers set on the pathway to HE came to follow an Apprenticeship, and what features contributed to the change in direction and turn to HE as evidenced in the biographies of Jamie, Liam, Elizabeth, Paul, Nina and Tom. I wanted to understand the mechanisms that had led to these decisions and the role of individual agency in decision-making around education participation. My application of Margaret Archer's lens of reflexivity and the internal conversation (2003, 2007, 2012) stemmed from a dissatisfaction with the work of other theorists such as Bourdieu (1986, 1989, 1990) in trying to understand how individuals navigate the unusual pathway from an Apprenticeship to HE. This approach has sought to understand the action of progression to HE through potential powers of agency and structure, and an understanding of the relationships between the former Apprentice and their 'networks of influence'. Understanding the nature of a former Apprentices' internal conversations about HE progression and how they sought, or not, confirmation from others emphasises how decisions were often mediated through relationships with network members and their workplace contexts. For example, Lucy's gives an insight into her perception of the engineering sector as being dominated by the need to gain professional accreditation. This led to her 'concern' to achieve a HE qualification to obtain professional respect, be seen as an 'expert' in her field and move towards the core of her workplace practice community. Lucy's concern for a HE credential was sustained through her relationship with her workplace mentor, who supported Lucy's need for confirmation of her actions and pushed her to achieve her ambitions.

Traits of autonomous reflexivity is a frequent feature, which is perhaps to be expected given that Archer (2007, p.192) suggests that that autonomous reflexives hold a "personal power, a generative mechanism fostering upward social mobility". This study has focused on individuals who have followed the unusual route from an Apprenticeship to HE; the individuals have been motivated to develop themselves and their careers - to 'getting on' within their fields. Motivations for embarking on HE was to support entry into professional

spheres or to change career, reflecting Archer's (2007) discussion around the importance of work in the internal conversation of autonomous reflexives (See also Section 6.4.2).

Furthermore, many of the former Apprentices are one of the first in their family to study in HE (with siblings having attended or parents as mature students), whereby HE participation breaks from the expectations of their families and social networks. This wish to look beyond the familiar pathways to design one's modus vivendi is a further echo of autonomous reflexivity as someone who:

Find[s] himself acquiring new experiences and confronting novel situations for which his natal context provides no guidelines... Thus has to learn to rely on his own resources.

Archer (2007, p.194)

The second mode of reflexivity that commonly emerges is communicative reflexivity. Archer (2003, 2007, 2012) suggests that individuals who draw on communicative reflexivity lack confidence in their own internal conversations leading them to externalise and seek the input of others. In her later work, she suggests the decline of society's 'contextual continuity' has made communicative reflexivity difficult to sustain, relating this to the advance of late modernity and the growing unpredictability of social life (Archer, 2012). She argues this reduces the opportunity for communicative reflexives to rely on the security and familiarity associated with 'staying put' within social structures. In the context of this study, communicative reflexivity was demonstrated through the participants' desire for consistency within their workplaces, geographic localities, friendship groups and disciplines. Staying put in the sense of maintaining relationships, sustaining contact with 'similar and familiars' and continuity within their discipline are features of many of the narratives – present in the participants' decisions to study close to home, to remain with their employer, and to persist within a particular field of work. Retaining these close networks, and indeed building them, helps ensure individuals can sustain aspects of communicative reflexivity. Archer suggests that communicative reflexives "must have at least one other particular whom they trust implicitly in order to exercise the 'thought and talk' pattern" (2003, p.167). These trusted individuals are present, to a greater or lesser extent, in all the Apprentice networks that have been presented with the case studies highlighting specific situations that involved participants garnering the opinions of their networks to extend their internal conversations. While careers are considered to be of greater importance to those with autonomous traits, for communicatives externalising their inner conversations arguably helped them define and move towards achieving their career goals. In this situation, participants appeared to adopt different modes of reflexivity

depending on the emphasis of their considerations.

One area of disjuncture is with Archer's idea that communicative reflexivity involves "smooth dovetailing of their multiple concerns - family and friends being their ultimate concern" (2003, p.169). While families and friends were prominent in the network accounts, arguably due to the nature of the method, this statement does not necessarily fit with the data. However, this may be explained by the focus on the participants' work and education decision-making. While the personal networks were of paramount consideration, participants were not specifically asked about their concern for their individuals within their networks rather how they had been influenced by them. Several participants, most notably those living at home or with long-term partners, discussed anxieties about the impact of their studies and/or work on their families which demonstrates a clear level of concern. Archer claims that communicative reflexives in her study "harmoniously accommodated" (Archer, 2007, p.169) work and leisure concerns giving prime concern to families and friends. Yet again, this statement does not ring true, most of the participants talked of prioritising their studies and/or work and recognised the pressures in managing these competing priorities. Samuel discussed the ending of a romantic relationship, Jamie and Elizabeth talked of the distancing from friendship groups while Claire discussed the difficulties in her marriage due to prioritising their studies and working lives.

Mo's case study provides an example of a developing mode of reflexivity, in his case from communicative towards autonomous traits. Mo's early discussions about his decision-making and in many aspects his early experiences of his HE studies he draws on an approach to reflexivity that could be seen as communicative. His early interviews reflect the support he receives from a close network of family and friends who supported him during his decision-making about an Apprenticeship and then later HE study. His communicative nature underpins his orientation and attitude to HE study; he developed a close network of peers, reciprocating advice and support yet at the same time maintaining a close relationship with his family, for example, he talks of his father continuing to visit to watch every weekend football match he plays. In his becoming a student, there is a shift in his perspective of the value of his network to his decision-making, but also in his self-perception. Mo's initial indecision about studying abroad is overcome through his conversation with others yet his move abroad forces discontinuity due to location which deprived him of his interlocutors. However, this led to greater self-reliance and independence, and a confidence that his internal conversations were sufficient to develop a suitable course of action:

The life experience has been second to none. I didn't dream of how much I would

have got from this year. I knew I would make friends and experience a different culture, but the amount of life skills, my confidence, enthusiasm to do new stuff and experience new places has been second to none.

(Mo, third interview)

Rose's case is most inconsistent with the rest of the narratives; after completing her Apprenticeship she returns to the final year of her degree, yet her intense focus on her studies and embracing this second chance is an isolating and stressful experience. While Rose's less desirable possible self is highly motivating, her desirable career possible self is insufficiently formed; as such she struggles to see beyond the end of her degree to formulate a post-graduation plan.

I've now finished my degree and it's like well what now, what do I do now? Because that was such a big focus for so many years that now I've finished it, I don't really know where to go or what I should be looking towards.

(Rose, second interview)

Despite displaying an autonomous approach in her early decision-making, leaving university without a clear plan and moving back home to her parents appears to trigger a displacement to her reflexivity. This is potentially compounded by a lack of graduate-level opportunities within Rose's discipline leading her deliberations to intensify her disorientation rather than enabling her career ambitions and producing action. As Archer discusses, those who display fractured reflexivity "admit to huge difficulties in making decisions, in defining courses of action to be consistently pursued and, above all, in engaging in anything more than the survivalist's day-to-day planning" (2012, p.248). There are other narratives that highlight moments where reflexivity could have been fractured. For example, any adverse effect of Lucille's first manager on her sense of self, work and studies may have been diverted by the manager's departure from the workplace. Archer (2007) suggests that social structures can have a negative impact and the absence of trusting relationships can impede reflexivity but argues that reflexivity can be restored if "circumstances became more favourable and provided that their relations supported their return" (Archer, 2012, p.290). By Rose's final interview a new work role became a means of moving forward in her indecision about her future career. Although, I would speculate that Rose may have recovered her reflexivity quicker had she had a network to turn to for support and advice.

One mode of reflexivity which seldom featured in the participants' accounts is that of meta-reflexivity; which is associated with spirituality and participation in religious or environmental

organisations. Archer (2003) claims values associated with such activities become an individual's most significant life concern. Sarah in her first interview suggests she was motivated to pursue physiotherapy as "something where you would help someone in some way" and which would allow her to integrate her sporting concerns. However, after failing to achieve the grades required for entry, she starts a sports therapy degree and these values appear to dissipate. Claire draws on meta-reflexive concerns in her pursuit of employment opportunities, discussing her values of giving something back rather than pursuing upward mobility yet ultimately her concern is for her family. Simon is the only participant I view as aligning more closely with meta-reflexivity traits yet there are many elements of this mode which conflict with his narrative. Archer (2012) suggests meta-reflexives seek to disrupt their natal backgrounds as they wish their imagined family, and potentially their future possible self, to be characteristically different to the one they grew up in which rings true to Simon's vision for his future yet his distancing from his family is forced which is more reminiscent of autonomous subjects:

I always wanted to leave [county] because my parents brought me there and it held a lot of unhappy memories... I wanted to get out and do something new... I wanted to get away.

(Simon, first interview)

Meta-reflexivity is also present in Simon's discussions about the connection to his discipline and his views on the importance of arts and heritage within society. In many ways, his discussions about his background within the arts and his vision of his future possible self reflect an embracing of a commitment to his field as a 'vocation' which provides a sounding board for his decision-making and planning. Simon scrutinises the options available to him through this commitment, which has implications for his student and occupational identity. For example, Simon is required to complete a work placement as part of his degree but frustrated by the nature of placements on offer he approaches a local arts organisation to arrange his own placement:

When I saw the placements... I thought they looked a bit weak... You spend a year of your life and actually it amounts to nothing really... I just decided that it didn't look like anything that I felt would be a decent experience for me so I just looked in other places.

(Simon, second interview)

Archer (2012) offers a suggestion as to why meta-reflexivity may be less evident in this study;

she suggests meta-reflexives view education as having its own value and opening the doors to like-minded friendships. Comparing this to her suggestion that communicatives largely view education as an “obstacle course” (ibid., p.223) which must be navigated if the individual is to obtain the required credentials while autonomous reflexives view education as something to be exploited for its potential to “open doors to lucrative careers” (ibid., p.223). I would argue the reason why so little meta-reflexivity is present in the participants’ narratives is due to having come through a vocational learning pathway they have been socialised into viewing learning outcomes in credential and instrumental terms much like a communicative or autonomous reflexive. Furthermore, their experience within HE further cements this view as many struggle to engage with the social and personal development aspects of HE due to work commitments, thus remaining on the periphery of the student community.

The former Apprentices exercised considerable agency in gaining access to HE, and this research emphasises the personal power of individuals in negotiating HE progression. In the main, the participants demonstrate that HE study was part of a formulated plan to move them towards their career goals and achieve work and financial stability. All of the participants, apart from Rose, were highly focused on the potential graduate career outcomes with little indecision about their next steps. This conflicts with the view that communicative reflexives struggle “to see far enough ahead to design a project to which [they] can commit” (Archer, 2007, p.171). Lucy, Jamie and Samuel, who aligned with a communicative approach in the latter stages of HE all drew on their networks to support their next steps. All of the participants displaying communicative reflexive traits placed a high value on ‘contextual continuity’, valuing the stability inherent within their family, work and personal relationships that emerge from a biographical connection to a network of ‘familiar’ and ‘similar’ and to which turned to for support. While Archer (2007) perceives communicatives as the least socially mobile due to the strength of these connections, in this study this is against a backdrop of evolving networks that change shape as they come to include work colleague and tutors with diverse backgrounds and perspectives. In Samuel’s final interview he discusses weighing up his options of pursuing a Legal Practice Course or an MBA through a selective and evaluative approach indicative of an autonomous reflexive (Archer, 2007). He understands the practical and financial constraints of moving into a law career and considers continuing within a financial career in which he is thriving. Yet, in making an actual decision, he talks his options through with his network of influence and seeks to balance with his concern for settling down and prioritising a long-term relationship. Jamie’s post-HE decision-making reflects a similar process with an autonomous approach to exploring and seeking opportunities, but when he is offered two distinctively

different graduate roles, he turns to his network, particularly his HE tutor. While Archer places 'contextual continuity' as a central aspect of communicative reflexives, the decisions made by Samuel and Jamie and others represent disjuncture from their family background yet a continuity with the experiences and backgrounds of their newer networks.

Archer's modes of reflexivity provide a useful framework for thinking about an individual's progression to HE as a reflexive project within their constellation of education and career possibilities. In this study, it has been difficult to apply a fixed or even dominant mode of reflexivity to the case studies as the temporal and contextual considerations suggest a need for a more dynamic understanding. I deviate from Archer's use of the notion of 'usual modes of reflexivity' as my analysis suggests a shifting between modes depending upon the context. Utilising Archer in this way helps us understand how individuals may draw on different modes of reflexivity throughout their life-course, in response to different educational and career decisions and taking into account the structure and nature of their social network. This in part echoes the findings of Dyke, Johnston, and Fuller (2012) that individuals may draw on different reflexive approaches in particular situations rather than as dominant modes but I argue the placing this in the context of changing network structures may help to understand this better. The network case studies appear to suggest that the evolving relationships in networks of influence and an individual's changing education and career situations lead to shifting approaches to reflexivity to help them navigate their pathway. It would be interesting to explore whether the adaptation to a person's mode of reflexivity stabilises as they mature and settle into a career pathway. This study took place as most of the participants were embarking on or in the early stages of a career and this unsettled early period in their lives could be accountable for the changing modes of reflexivity as people developed their life projects and constellations of concern.

8.4 Discussion and implications of the research

This second part of the chapter returns to each of the research questions to weave together and summarise the analysis.

8.4.1 How does the English institutional and policy context frame Apprentice progression to higher education?

The first research question sought to ground this research within its broader policy and institutional context acknowledging that context is central to the exploration of situated lived experiences. The context in which this research took place was one of promoting work-based

learning, strengthening progression pathways and widening participation with the Apprenticeship context having altered considerably over the course of this study.

The group of individuals in this study found themselves making their way into HE at a time when a structural ladder from vocational and work-based learning to HE had been created, albeit with some rungs missing. In the early 2000s, the introduction of Foundation Degrees and the expansion of local, flexible HE created more opportunities for individuals to study work-related HE programmes which recognised informal learning environments beyond the confines of a university, becoming trailblazers for new forms of HE provision, and one could argue broadened the acceptance of different types of learning and knowledge. Symes and McIntyre (2000) argue this changing context represented a shift towards a 'new vocationalism' and a growing recognition of the need to move away from the narrowness of pure vocational qualifications towards transferable skills and knowledge. Despite the move towards flexible, responsive forms of HE less than a decade after Foundation Degrees were introduced the establishment of student numbers controls in 2010 led to a significant decline in flexible provision as universities shifted full-time sub-degree students onto first degree courses as a "rational response to the existence of student number controls" (HEFCE, 2014, p.8). Over the same period, a reduction in employer investment in degree-level study and changes to student finance eligibility impacted part-time HE students with the numbers plummeting by 55% in the six years leading to 2015/16 (HESA, 2017). Furthermore, the subsequent lifting of the cap on student numbers in 2014/15⁷³ has contributed to an environment in which there is less incentive for institutions to offer flexible provision with universities increasingly serving the needs of young, full-time students (Wolf, 2015). Notwithstanding, there have been enormous increases in the number of individuals with HE-level qualifications reflective of both government policy and social forces as individuals are aware of the pressure to be competitive in a globalised economy.

HE participation of the former Apprentices in this study can, in many ways, be linked to a policy environment that enabled them to benefit from opportunities to progress to HE through mainly, local provision utilising the qualifications and experience accrued through their Apprenticeship. The proliferation of entry routes into HE study was critical in providing space for these participants to become a HE student, linked to their future career aspirations. Yet, this study also accentuates the highly stratified nature of HE admissions which is particularly noticeable for former Apprentices with non-traditional Level 3 qualifications. Participants like

⁷³ And subsequent removal of student number controls in 2015/16.

Gethen, Mo and Sarah who were from middle-class families, with a tradition of HE participation, recognised that the Apprenticeship alone would not be sufficient to gain entry to a degree at an elite institution and looked to ensure entry would be possible through supplementing with additional qualifications. Others, like Jamie and Paul, but who found their way towards HE much later and with little understanding of the stratified nature of HE, found that their qualification and experience were not recognised by several institutions or courses.

The most recent contemporary major Apprenticeship reform programme (see Section 2.2) is aimed at meeting the changing needs of employers, learners and providers and raising the status and credibility of the Apprenticeship brand. A central aspect of these reforms is to ensure Apprenticeships offer the individual an opportunity for educational and career progression through a stronger emphasis on ensuring Apprenticeship enhances labour market mobility and career advancement (Richard, 2012). The removal of the mandatory requirement to include nationally-recognised qualifications in the new Apprenticeship Standards could have a catastrophic effect on the personal and career development prospects of Apprentices. There is potential for the new Apprenticeship Standards to create an industry talent pipeline yet if learners that commence an Apprenticeship below HE level are denied the opportunity to gain relevant, accredited qualifications there is a significant danger that a two-tier system will be created. There is a need to recognise that theoretical knowledge underpins competence on the job, and as such an equal weighting should be given to both knowledge and skills to support progression through the Apprenticeship family, higher-level learning and careers.

Understanding the implications for future Apprentices wishing to create a pathway to HE is more complicated due to the changing policy context. However, despite the new changes to accreditation and qualification, the increase in Apprentice participation alongside focused employer involvement in design may help to ensure Apprenticeships are once again seen as a high quality, post-compulsory pathway. Furthermore, the growth in Higher and Degree Apprenticeship (see Section 2.3) may contribute to this change in perception through bridging some of the gaps in flexible HE progression pathways for vocational learners. However, there is a more significant implication around culture change. The incorporation of Higher and Degree Apprenticeship could potentially alter the profile of HE learners, help to reconceptualise vocational learning and the relationship between workplace and academic knowledge, encourage HE providers to develop innovative frameworks for HE study and to tailor the curriculum and explore new pedagogies. More cynically, these programmes also have the potential to become a rebadged version of existing provision, providing a financially attractive

alternative pathway to traditional, middle class HE students.

8.4.2 What educational and broader network features have contributed to former Apprentices navigating a pathway to Higher Education?

The former Apprentices did not naturally construct themselves as practical learners focusing attention on the idea that Apprentices and vocational learners may not reject academic learning, but merely forms of teaching and learning that they view as inferior, poor quality or less aligned to their preferred ways of acquiring knowledge. The Apprenticeship offered a learning and work environment consonant with their perceived mature outlook and interest in learning connected to the work environment. For example, Lucille, Lucy and Samuel alongside others, describe a different type of engagement in their Apprenticeship recognising that it facilitated entry into a skilled occupation:

I just didn't get a certificate like I got with my A levels I got like to actually have an impact on the children's lives and actually get involved with it properly. In college I just got bored, the first time around with my A levels, it was so boring.

(Lucille, first interview)

However, many encountered inadequate information and advice about post-compulsory pathways meaning many felt coerced into A Levels despite expressing a preference for an alternative. There is a multitude of factors at play in this misdirected and fragmented guidance; partly the localised, ad hoc nature of Apprenticeship recruitment and the poor condition of careers education which is coupled with a tendency for teaching and career professionals to direct those with above average achievement down pathways leading to HE, reproducing established pathways. Consequently, some of the participants (including Jamie, Elizabeth, Lucille, Liam, Lucy and Nina) experienced disrupted post-16 transitions after pursuing unsuitable pathways. As such, the participants had to exercise significant agency to locate information about Apprenticeships, gathering 'hot' knowledge (Vincent and Ball, 1998) from their networks, such as Liam, Lucille, Lucy, Nina, Paul, Samuel and Tom who became aware of Apprenticeships through friends and relatives:

I spoke to my friend, and she mentioned about her dad's one⁷⁴. But if, if I hadn't spoken to her about it, I never would have found that.

⁷⁴ He is an engineer at the company where Nina is later offered an Apprenticeship. The company has long supported engineering Apprenticeships, hence her friend's father awareness of the opportunities, and had recently extended Apprenticeships into other areas of the business.

A proportion of participants also followed family member into an Apprenticeship suggesting that decision-making can often be based on limited information and family dynasties which may serve to constrain 'horizons for action' (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996) and limit exposure to diverse opportunities. The network's familiarity with vocational learning led to an expectation that they would find people like themselves with similar values and aspirations. While some parents (for instance, Elizabeth, Lucille, Lucy, Nina and Samuel's) aspired for their children to follow a pathway to HE⁷⁵ they were ultimately supportive of the vocational route, seemingly at ease with the discourse of individual responsibility (Reay and Ball, 1998). Noteworthy is that the former Apprentices in this study have further contributed to their network's biographical history of vocational learning, with several reflecting that their positive experiences had served to encourage siblings and peers to consider an Apprenticeship.

The former Apprentices experienced very different models of Apprenticeship; some provided a strategic, systematic form of Apprenticeship while others might be better described as chaotic and unplanned, some offered expansive learning opportunities (Fuller and Unwin, 2003, 2006, 2008) yet many revealed a range of restrictive features. Elizabeth, India, Jamie, Nina and Samuel's more restrictive experience led to a swift journey from legitimate peripheral participation to full participation. This was at the expense of broader learning possibilities and represented a moderately linear journey, which can be contrasted with the experience of Liam, Lucy, Tom and Paul who engaged in four-year intensive schemes. The movement to the core of their practice communities was much slower; they are recognised as learners, participate in significant 'off-the-job' learning and became peripheral members of the broader workplace community as they rotate through work processes alongside more experienced colleagues. There are fundamental differences in the Apprentices' "learning as becoming" (Wenger, 1998; Hodkinson *et al.*, 2008) and the way they move centripetally from being a novice to full participation. By the end of Elizabeth, India, Jamie, Nina, Samuel, Liam and Paul's Apprenticeships they had gained their occupational identity, were perceived by colleagues as proficient, operated independently at the core of the community yet without further training had few opportunities for progression beyond their immediate job role. Lucy and Tom's reality was far different, even after their Apprenticeship they were positioned somewhere between novice and expert and their occupational identities were viewed by their employers as still under development. This acknowledgement gave them greater freedom to explore

⁷⁵ This is despite not having attended HE study themselves.

professional development opportunities. However, the narratives of Elizabeth, India, Jamie, Nina, Samuel and Liam suggest that through exercising considerable personal agency and a focus on self-development circumvents the disadvantages of a restrictive learning environment with Apprenticeship extending horizons for action.

8.4.3 How have these experiences and the former Apprentices' 'networks of influence' influenced aspirations and identity?

Apprenticeship learning, by its very nature, creates a sense of shared occupational identity as the individual journeys centripetally from the periphery to the centre of the community. This shared occupational identity is part of a broader system of relations with established workers, with participants suggesting these relationships have a meaningful impact on attitudes and future trajectory (Hatmaker, Park and Rethemeyer, 2011). Participants spoke of the nurturing nature of the relationships with colleagues signalling their importance in helping the Apprentice to develop competence, self-confidence and occupational identity; thus, moving from the periphery of the occupation to become embedded in the community. Elizabeth, Jamie, Lucy, Nina, Rose, Samuel and Tom spoke of senior colleagues who helped them develop a future orientation in their careers, a future possible self (Markus and Nurius, 1986), and confidence to pursue opportunities for learning. These relationships enhanced understanding of the broader industry and the value of HE credentials with the participants' accounts suggesting that those who receive such support acquire a greater agency to seize opportunities to advance their careers. Despite little formal career advice, 'generational encounters' (Fuller and Unwin, 2003) within the workplace communities helped participants develop ideas about possible progression opportunities, within and outside their organisation. For others, like Liam, Paul, and Simon, the Apprenticeship had extended their horizons for action (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996) through the development of positive learner identities and perceptions of not only what is possible but a greater self-concept of what is possible for them, enabling them to consider further learning opportunities within the field. Social and workplace networks provide the backdrop against which decision-making is embedded, and this study acknowledges that these networks change and evolve, they are permeable and partial by their nature. These developing networks offered communicative reflexives access to trusted, knowledgeable individuals who could extend and confirm their internal conversation to support their next steps. Furthermore, workplace relations were more diverse than the participants had previously experienced; many were inter-generational and provided a career role model and a temporal insight into career development. The influence of this is noticeable

in several narratives but particularly poignant in Rose's discussions about the influence of her Apprenticeship workplace network in her return to HE after a fragmented work history. There is another benefit to these networks, as Samuel and Jamie and others have recognised; a value in building power and status to maximise career benefits:

It feels weird thinking that I used to be an Apprentice, and now I'm presenting to banking directors. So, that has allowed me to get exposure.

(Samuel, second interview)

Yet the value of the networks is greater than power; where they are nurturing and cooperative, they facilitate access to information about development opportunities and provide career and emotional support. These relationships have been significant in the former Apprentices' aspirations and turn towards HE. Having a sense of belonging to a community of practice and being respected for their contributions plays a role in developing an aspiration to progress to HE, as the participants began to understand what it might mean to go beyond their current position. For the participants who entered the Apprenticeship as a route into a career, the shift in perspective to becoming a student was relatively new – it had not necessarily been with them during school or the early stages of their Apprenticeship but had been acquired in fragmented ways through their Apprenticeship experience. The former Apprentices had made clear assessments of their career prospects which they had bound together with their level of education recognising that HE credentials hold significant currency across many industries and are fundamental for advancement in fields such as engineering, education and health. Noticeably absent from participant accounts is reference to strategic employer participation⁷⁶ in the individual's progression to HE, suggesting that progression is engineered by the Apprentice but can be supported or indeed impeded by their employer.

Other participants, Claire, Gethen, Lucille, Mo and Sarah, had all aspired to HE before starting the Apprenticeship and may be considered to be different in their learning intentions than the perceived traditional Apprenticeship learner are viewed as using their Apprenticeship to seek entry into the workplace. Their engagement in the learning process was focused on a particular goal, for Mo, Sarah and Gethen, to become elite sports professional and for Claire and Lucille, more unusually as a work-based pathway to HE. For these participants, their aspiration to progress to HE was ever-present, merely cemented by the Apprenticeship.

⁷⁶ Only Elizabeth, Lucy, Nina and Tom received any form of employer support for study. Often solely in the form of tuition fee support and unpaid leave to study.

Nevertheless, the experience of being an Apprenticeship and the development of their occupational identity impacted on their becoming a HE student.

8.4.4 How do former Apprentices experience the academic and social practice of Higher Education?

The decision to enter HE was primarily based on the understanding that HE credentials would help facilitate entry to new professional fields or higher professional levels. Credentialism was significant in almost all the participants' narratives, suggesting that credentialist thinking of HE progression is of prime importance to those with prior work experiences and that individuals with vocational backgrounds may be socialised into viewing the outcomes of learning in such terms. This also has an impact on how the participants perceive and engage with HE learning; with most participants perceiving their engagement with HE comparable to 'going to work', with part-time students viewing HE as episodes within the working week, rather than as an all-embracing experience of student life. As such, they do not fully align with student identity and their narratives conflict with the idealised model of student life (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003). Many of the participants self-funded their studies, lived at home, worked locally, attended a geographically-close institution and consequently spent little time in the HE environment. They reflected on being too busy with other aspects of their lives to fully engage with being a student and with peers beyond their immediate course group. However, they had all absorbed messages about what life as a HE student 'should' be like and reflected on feeling like they were missing out on a HE experience that crossed academic, social and transformational boundaries.

The former Apprentices in this study had predominantly chosen vocational, work-related courses and favoured the work-related aspects, yet many discussed enjoying theoretically challenging modules and recognised the role of such learning. The language in studies of vocational education and progression to HE, too often constructs these learners as deficient in the necessary knowledge and qualities to participate in HE with references to a poverty of aspirations and inadequate entry qualifications with this discourse of individual deficit arguably one of the most significant barriers to a more equitable and accessible system of HE (Fuller *et al.*, 2008). As this thesis has presented, the words of the participants do not reflect this deficit discourse and highlight the inaccurate assumption in the literature that vocational learners suffer disadvantages in their progression to HE. The participants entered HE concerned about achieving within an academic system yet rapidly came to understand how to fulfil the requirements of their academic programmes; of becoming a HE student. Although

some of the participants did experience difficulty, the non-deficit approach of this study revealed insights into strategies to manage HE study. Studying in HE, irrespective of background can be challenging for anyone since financial, motivational, social and emotional issues can obstruct becoming, yet the participants discussed coping with challenges as a critical part of becoming a student. That is not to say there were no instances of discomfort or concern in the HE environment and there were examples of uncompromising structures or an absence of support which made HE study more challenging particularly for those combining work and study. However, the structural obstacles to full participation were often in the form of HE not understanding the former Apprentices' educational and work experiences which manifested itself in qualifications being undervalued or not recognised for entry, a lack of appropriate information about admissions and the practical challenge of combining employment with the frequently rigid structures of HE. As discussed previously (in Section 7.2.1), the participants studying HE programmes that had a greater vocational orientation or close workplace associations, such as business, nursing, education and some sub-degree engineering, suggest the learning culture was more accommodating and offered a synergy with the participant's occupational identity. The participants also discussed underlying psychosocial barriers such as being unfamiliar with the HE learning and teaching culture, which led to feelings that about being unable to cope with the academic demands. Very few expressed notions of being deficient and those that did refer to them in passing terms, feelings that subsided once engaged in the HE environment with the participants all enjoying academic success. Recognising the limitations addressed in Section 7.1 and the nature of self-selection within the participant cohort, all the former Apprentices have all enjoyed academic success and have flourished in a HE system despite their non-traditional pathway.

The participant narratives revealed several aspects of learning to become successful HE students: increased knowledge and understanding of the customs of HE learning, practical strategies to manage learning, and enhanced critical skills. Supporting these themes is the importance of time in accruing the skills and competencies to be a HE student and that entering HE with an occupational identity appears fundamental to sustaining motivation through the learning experience. HE study facilitates the acquisition of higher levels of subject-specific knowledge yet for those combining work and study they had entered HE understanding occupational language, skills and behaviour contributing to the participants legitimate participation in their HE learning. Furthermore, networks of influence continued to be a primary source of support throughout HE; participants talked about the emotional and practical support offered by their networks, and the enduring nature of this support was

striking. This is reflective of the strength of network ties and the continued connection of the participants to their social and workplace context. While the workplace connections were more apparent in the part-time students, Jamie and Simon both discussed continuing to draw on the support of workplace networks for specific advice on careers, part-time employment and job placements.

It has been argued that the challenge of becoming a student is most marked amongst those without any family experience of HE, where there is “no reservoir of knowledge to draw upon” (Christie *et al.*, 2008, p.569). However, this fails to recognise that with those from work-based backgrounds often have access to support networks beyond the immediate confines of the family. Many of the participants drew upon the knowledge and experience of a broad network; which provides a source of hot knowledge (Vincent and Ball, 1998) often about specific HE programmes and the HE environment. For example, Elizabeth discusses a senior colleague who followed the same pathway into the same HND. The relationship she develops with this person helps give her the confidence to pursue the programme and develop an understanding of the course demands. Lucy also discusses her workplace mentor helping prepare her for the HE programme in combination with the familiarity she already had with staff on the degree programme who had taught her during her Apprenticeship. The networks of support sustained those participants with a more communicative nature and those like Jamie and Samuel, who became more communicative during their HE experience.

Furthermore, the newly formed HE networks helped the participants retain a sense of future ambitions and the role HE would play in this. Several discussed how the relationships with course peers had broadened career perspectives which added to the perceived value of the HE experience. Furthermore, the relationships with student peers played an integral role in the participants becoming a student. In the main, the HE networks were subject bound and had direct relevance for the participants’ sense of belonging to the community, reinforcing confidence in learning and thereby strengthening their student identity. The relationships within, and with the HE environment, evolved from the participants drawing out support in the early stages of their HE experiences as they were positioned on the periphery, yet becoming key contributors as they journeyed to the centre thus further strengthened their student identity and authenticity.

8.4.5 What impact has this had upon their (re)construction of identity as learners within Higher Education?

For former Apprentices, becoming a student is part of a continuous process of identity construction which is seen to be central to modern life (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992). The attitudes towards entering HE was primarily one of credentials and competitiveness with the need for formal recognition as a means of validating their occupational identity and as the passport to a professional career. The economic climate when the participants first made their transition to HE (2012/13) was challenging and congested, potentially heightening the discourses that HE is a means to obtain relatively safe, secure employment. I would also argue that the participants have also been subjected to the notions of a 'knowledge economy' and the pressure on individuals to be responsible for their career and to invest in education and training (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; Furlong, 2009; Ball, 2012).

Identity transformation, a process of becoming is a central aspect of learning, developing a learner identity, belonging to an institution, and for many of the participants, this is intertwined with their sense of belonging to an employer and occupational role. The former Apprentices are not passive recipients of academic knowledge but have played an active and engaging role in their learning. Learner identity and learning careers are pertinent to understanding dispositions to learning and the influence of biographical narratives and cultural influences (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000b). Through the narratives, there is a clarity that the student identity is sharply contrasted with stereotypical beliefs about learners with vocational backgrounds. For example, Lucille highlights a disconnection with some of her Foundation Degree peers, due to her perception of their poor attitude to the theoretical aspects of learning. This was a general reflection by participants about the negative behaviours they appeared to associate with 'typical' students and a desire to distance themselves from this identity; of wanting to be, and be perceived by others as more adult and potentially more deserving of the HE experience

There is also an emotional investment in HE learning which is a significant aspect of becoming a student yet little is known about the difference that confidence, motivation and resilience make to an individual disposition to learning and the development of their learner identity as they make the transition from one setting to another (Christie *et al.*, 2008). This latter point is particularly relevant to those with vocational backgrounds who have to make the transition to learning environments which are unfamiliar. Part of the process of becoming a student was underpinned by a strong drive to engage in the academic practices of learning, yet those

participants combining work and study often found that they were only ever partial members of the HE community of practice. At times, this led to feelings of ambivalence as they were forced to make the decision to focus on the work aspect of their lives to the detriment of their studies. Many of the participants had to balance competing demands of work and HE study impacting on the way they study through seeking to ensure an equitable focus on both. As Samuel, discusses:

The law degree. It got to a point where I did to a point struggle to get it fitted in with work... Some days I'm not getting back until 8pm and I have to open a book and make food at the same time and it was just. Some days you just lost the motivation, physically because you couldn't do it.

(Samuel, third interview)

Yet, at the same time work was a key contributor to participants' learner identity having been built upon the foundation of occupational identity, feeling competent in their work-based experience and its underpinning knowledge. The participants' learner and occupational identities are intertwined and having been strengthened through the Apprenticeship journey contributed to their becoming a HE student and their future possible selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986). Personal motivation and its relationship with the participants' construction of future possible selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986) was also compelling in the narratives of how they managed difficulties in the HE learning experience. Most participants had commenced their programmes with an end goal of achieving the qualification, seeing this credential as leading to a professional career which they frequently cited as a driving force for when things got difficult. As we see in Jamie's account his motivations are driven by having experienced the physically demanding, unstable elements of employment and alludes to the possible self he is striving for, but also crucially the one he is seeking to avoid, which he feels sets him apart from fellow students.

Most participants had entered HE with a self-reliance and while the process of becoming a student impacted on their continued identity formation, this cannot be separated from other aspects of their working lives. This link between HE learning and career aspirations form an integral part of participants on-going identity formation. For example, Lucille's becoming a student aligned with her occupational identity when she received a promotion in the workplace. This promotion gave her more autonomy to reflect on her practice and implement the knowledge she had gained through her HE experience. Importantly, her future possible self and her drive to become a teacher enable Lucille to connect her past Apprenticeship

experience to support her becoming a student by giving meaning to her HE experiences. As such, the meaning that individuals attach to their learning choices needs to be understood in the context of their biographical experience as a whole. For Samuel, Lucy, Lucille and Nina, the Apprenticeship was only ever the first step into working which they saw as being the basis for a professional career and alternative to traditional forms of HE. The Apprenticeship provided a means to consolidate their identities as capable learners who were in search of an alternative pathway into a career. For Rose, as for Claire, the Apprenticeship not was a way to prove themselves and regain the confidence to re-enter HE for the second-time as mature learners.

The participants did not just blindly conform to an occupational identity (Brown, 1997); they are formed through relationships with colleagues, how they are and want to be perceived by others, and formed over time with the participants as actors in its construction. Similarly, the participants did not blindly conform to a student identity. Becoming a student varied as individuals interpreted it in line with their learning dispositions, their future possible self and the broader context of identity formation. The move into HE provided the participants with a learning context in which they could refine their lives and their sense of self and work towards a career which they perceive as more secure or fulfilling. While some of the participants brought with them experiences of academic marginality, the HE context also seemed to foster among these learners a powerful sense of agency. While they were reflective about their limitations, they also found greater confidence in their ability to realise their ambitions.

Learner identities are not one-dimensional; they are constructed of many facets as they interact with multiple social contexts. In recognising where occupational and learner identity align, it is also essential to recognise when these are under tension. Entering HE with a readily constructed occupational identity may at times conflict with the new student identity. There is arguably a tension between an individual's occupational and their developing learner identity (Boud and Solomon, 2003; Askham, 2008) which manifests itself within the workplace with participants being concerned at being perceived as a student. The politics of labelling oneself as a student within the workplace is complex and contains issues relating to position, recognition and power. Glimpses of this tension can be seen in the narratives of Elizabeth, Nina and Liam and to some extent Samuel; tension in maintaining a respected position within the workplace. While learning and working is a strength both for an organisation and the individual it can create an association with being a novice, or not being fully knowledgeable. It can also present a challenge to existing workplace relationships, positioning the individual away from an occupational group which was marked by Liam's experience due to the strength

of the community within his craft-based occupation.

The findings reflect the process of personal and social transformation involved in becoming a student. While HE is a key site for the construction of identity, this study has highlighted how Apprentices enter HE with distinct occupational and learner identities that contribute to their becoming a student without fully embracing the student identity. In the context of this study, becoming recognises the central importance of occupational identity, the nurturing role of social networks and the sometimes-conflicting roles and identities the participants needed to manage.

8.5 Contribution to knowledge

This study makes an original contribution to the literature on Apprenticeship and widening participation by illuminating the importance of social networks in an individual's decisions about their educational trajectory. It makes an important contribution to our understanding of structure and agency in educational participation decisions, highlighting the way that vocational choices, aspirations and future selves, are located at the intersection of multiple influences. Overlapping theoretical frameworks of the relationship between the construction of the identity of former Apprentices who progress to HE, the role and influence of social networks and modes of reflexivity provide a unique contribution to knowledge.

8.5.1 Apprentices as a group of HE students

This thesis has highlighted that progression from Apprenticeship to HE is diverse and complex, both due to the variety of qualifications proliferating the two fields and the nature and diversity of provision. While the low rates of progression to HE (Fuller and Unwin, 2012a, Joslin and Smith, 2013, 2014) beyond the end of an Advanced Apprenticeship does little to endorse HE as a potential pathway. While there has been an increasing focus of research into Apprenticeships that relates to learning and participation (for example, Fuller and Unwin, 2007, 2009) and learner identities (Brockmann, 2010), the progression from Apprenticeship to HE continues to be under-researched and the thesis makes a significant contribution to a very small field. There are several reasons why Apprenticeship progression is under-researched. Apprenticeship is not a qualification but a framework (see Section 2.1.1) and therefore in data regarding whether HE students have previously been an Apprentice is not identified, making tracking this cohort of students is difficult. Additionally, part-time students are also a neglected HE cohort (Callender and Wilkinson, 2013) and as this study recognises many former Apprentices chose to study part-time and retain their employment status. This study has

sought to redress this gap and while small in scale, the depth of data achieved through the narrative and network design has sought to give a voice to the experiences of former Apprentices in HE.

8.5.2 Networks as a methodological approach

Through rich narrative accounts of the individual and their network, I have been able to explore the complexities of a particular set of decisions and experiences of a group of under-researched individuals, which has called into question dominant narratives about vocational learners that do not match the experience of life as lived. The methodological approach of this study has drawn on the work of the Non-Participation in HE Project (see Heath *et al.*, 2008, 2009, 2010; Fuller and Heath, 2010; Fuller *et al.*, 2011) in recognising that to fully understand educational and career decision-making we need to understand the deeply embedded nature and the importance of the first-hand accounts of the wider network members. I have treated the individual rather than the network as the primary unit of analysis with the aim of ensuring the former Apprentice is at the heart of the study while interweaving of first-hand accounts from their nominated networks to give insight into the complexity of the decision-making, the tensions and contradictions. This has also enabled me to step back the network narratives to give dominance to the former Apprentice, for example, in the narrations of their HE experience. I have sought to understand how networks influence decision-making, shape an individual's predispositions and horizons for action, and to explore notions of shared biographies and histories which may help to understand the unusual pathway from an Apprenticeship to HE. In many ways this focus is not novel, as educational decision-making is often theorised as being inextricably linked to behaviours, attitudes and dispositions (see Ball, Maguire and Macrae, 2000a; Brooks, 2005; Reay, David and Ball, 2005). However, few studies researching a group of non-traditional HE students such as those with Apprenticeship backgrounds are based on the direct accounts of wider network members. This design has allowed me to locate an individual's decision-making whilst connecting it to the first-hand accounts of people around them.

The network case studies give a greater insight into decision-making and encourage an understanding both in terms of the participant's life events and the contextual and cultural landscape. Dyke, Johnson and Fuller (2012) suggest a network approach produces a more distinctive and diverse account of the individual, incorporating how others perceive them. Furthermore, the interviews with network members often gave a broader insight not only into the individuals' educational experience and socioeconomic circumstances but also to their

ambitions, values and possible futures. I support the suggestion that a longitudinal network methodology provides a rich, intricate picture to enable researchers to explore complexity in an individual's modes of reflexivity and to explore how individuals may demonstrate different reflexive approaches in different contexts and life events (Dyke, Johnson and Fuller, 2012). I would also argue that employing such a methodology during a significant adjustment to an individual's life events, such as their progression into HE study, can offer greater insight into an individual's reflexive approach and how their reflexivity may mature or respond to changing network dynamics. I strongly concur with the assertion that: "Networks provide a stronger basis for making sense of the world than any individual, potentially fallible, voice on its own" (Dyke, Johnson and Fuller, 2012, p.843).

The network case studies suggest that individuals draw on multiple approaches to reflexivity over their life course rather than conforming to one particular type. That said, modes of reflexivity appear context specific, while individuals may draw on differing approaches these are responsive to the nature and type of social network relationships. For instance, Samuel's early educational decision-making reveals aspects of autonomous reflexivity - self-reliance on his own resources partly, as he acknowledges, due to his networks inability to contribute to his decision to withdraw his university place due to their limited understanding about HE. Samuel presents the image of being independent in his decision-making, yet the diverse social interactions through his working life gave him access to interlocutors with professional careers to which he aspires. These interactions help draw out Samuel's communicative reflexivity and enable him to draw on the resources of his newly formed professional networks. Describing individuals as simply communicative/autonomous/fractured/meta 'reflexives' in the way that Archer (2008) implies, ignores that individuals are open to change modes, depending on context and the composition of their social network. Dyke and colleagues (2012) argue that the HE experience of younger participants can impact on the perception of older generations, yet in this study, the generational impact was witnessed both upwards and downwards between generations. For the young participants, occupational role models were powerful influencers but we also witness influence within generations such as the impact of Paul's and Jamie's siblings on their trajectory to HE. Modes of reflexivity could be better theorised if they drew further on the impact and influence of social network relationships and gave more significant attention to the dynamic and changing context of individual lives.

8.5.3 The role and influence of networks

The data generated by this study is extremely rich, allowing me to explore the influences on

the former Apprentice from across generations and diverse social and work backgrounds. As highlighted in the analysis there are numerous instances of the existence of shared attitudes and dispositions in relation to education and learning. Lucy and her mother, for example, shared a strong sense of valuing social relationships over their academic contributions. The data also highlighted common education and employment choices, for example, the Dawson, Ramchurn and Whitefield networks highlight 'dynasties' based on Apprenticeship participation. While some of this data is alluded to in the individual narratives, the richness of the network data leads me to reflect on the value of this approach when seeking to understand individual behaviour within their social context.

Similar to Heath, Fuller and Johnson (2009), there are questions about the entity on which I have data as my networks are only partial and a sample of broader network members. Consequently, there are gaps in the networks, which may or may not be significant, but which I suspect probably are. I am mindful of the fact that in many cases the 'missing' network members had potentially exerted considerable influence on the former Apprentice, yet for various reasons they were either not nominated or declined the invitation to participate. What I feel is more relevant is how this methodology could be adapted to examine in greater depth the fluidity and dynamism of networks as individuals make the transition from an Apprenticeship into HE. Replicating the longitudinal nature of the former Apprentice interviews with wider network members would aid the understanding of the temporal dimension of identity and integrate the changing role and influence of networks in the former Apprentices' learning careers and across the life course (Giele and Elder, 1998). Considering influence across a time span would support what Pahl (2000) describes as 'fossil friendships'; those acquaintances and peers who had a particular role at a specific stage in the life course, but who had subsequently become marginal. To employ this more complex approach would require greater structure to understanding the nature of the ties between network members.

My approach to determining the boundaries of the networks was primarily informed by what I perceived to be realistic in terms of achievability. My communications about this aspect with the participants made explicit my interest in influences on educational decision-making, the HE experience and the role of family, friends and other peers. I purposefully did not define what I meant by 'influence' but left this open to interpretation. However, this interpretation was no doubt shaped by what the participant knew of my study, explicitly and implicitly, taken from our interview sessions in which they were asked to discuss their educational and employment experiences and to reflect on the role of network members in these spheres. These

interpretations led to a variety of contacts being suggested, most commonly parents, siblings and partners but also friends, managers and HE tutors. Some of the most interesting insights into the changing nature of social networks arose from this latter group of network members, and it would be interesting for further work in the field to explore in greater depth the network members outside of the confines of family and friends.

The networks in this study are not uniform in their composition, but there is consistency in the stage of the former Apprentice's life with all the network members having all being deemed influential in their decisions and experiences. Some were close friends and relatives with whom the former Apprentice was in regular contact; others were relatively new HE tutors. Conceptualising networks as "configurations of people rather than collectivities with definite boundaries" (Crow, 2003, p.8), as malleable in form as new people join and others exit is a particularly beneficial way of understanding the influence of networks over person's life course and during transitions in work or education. Methodologically, the network data have permitted me to consider the participants from different viewpoints through which I have gained a deeper understanding of the individual from the accounts of their network. It would also be interesting to unpick the impact such a methodology has on the individual participant who understands that the study is considering them and their experiences in relation to their wider connections.

8.6 Implications for policy and practice

There are imperatives to improve the status and quality of Apprenticeships in England with contemporary policy seeking to realign the Apprenticeship model by placing the employer and learner at the heart of the system. Apprenticeships should be the reserve of high quality, employment-based learning underpinned by theoretical knowledge and general education to enable occupational as well as personal development. As Avis (2004) notes, Apprentices should have access to knowledge that allows them to reflect on and criticise established practice (Engeström, 2004), to transcend contexts to enable occupational mobility and to have long-term perspectives that include progression to HE.

Despite rhetoric and policy regarding Apprenticeships as part of a progression pathway into HE (see Section 2.4) with fewer, flexible HE programmes available combined with the increase in student fees may serve to make it more challenging for former Apprentices to access HE. Furthermore, the removal of the requirement for qualifications to be embedded in Apprenticeship Standards (DBIS, 2015b) will do little to help those who wish to progress and

may further hinder the status of vocational education by reinforcing the academic-vocational divide. As the narratives highlight, the participants enjoyed academic learning, particularly when incorporated with a work-related approach which aligned with their occupational and learner identities. However, as this thesis has found, learner identities can and do change. Stereotypical perceptions and presumptions around the possible performance of vocational learners can contribute to feeling inferior in the academic community and may result in the tempering of expectations. The education system needs to develop a culture of higher expectations for all, along with greater equality in the perceived value of both academic and vocational pathways.

The following are suggestions for more equitable access to HE for former Apprentices and are a result of the empirical data gathered, the culmination of three years of research and my professional practice. This thesis highlights the inaccurate assumptions about the pathologising of former Apprentices as being deficient, without the 'proper' educational background, or in lacking the aspiration. Although many of the former Apprentices in this study experienced some difficulties in their transition to HE, this research reveals insights into their strategies to become effective HE students. Suggestions for change are outlined under 'strengthening progression pathways' and 'innovative HE delivery and support' which emphasise the findings of this research.

8.6.1 Strengthening progression pathways to HE

There is a myriad of reasons why Apprenticeship progression to HE is low. Some are structural, relating to HE admissions and the Apprenticeship model of learning while as adults with work responsibility, former Apprentices have careers and personal responsibilities that impact on the potential to undertake further learning. The Apprenticeship Standards which conceptualise Apprenticeship in terms a staged journey to becoming a fully skilled practitioner provide a persuasive rationale for coordinated progression pathways. The content of Level 2, Level 3 and Level 4 Apprenticeships should be reviewed and enhanced to ensure they provide the underpinning knowledge, competence and skills to provide a clear pathway to higher level study for those that want to progress. Standards should include rigorous, respected qualifications to ensure Apprentices can meet the entry requirements for higher level study. Furthermore, Apprenticeship Standards should be formally recognised through the UCAS tariff and combined with activity to ensure HE providers have a greater awareness of the knowledge, skills and competencies former Apprentices bring to HE.

Apprenticeship Trailblazers should work to ensure Apprenticeship Standards include detailed information about progression pathways including professional status to ensure Apprentices have a clear understanding of learning and career progress opportunities and are supported to consider their personal and professional development.

If Apprentices are to be supported in their career and HE progression there is a need for a stronger knowledge base. This knowledge base can only be improved if there is a robust mechanism for statistically monitoring the movements of former Apprentices to HE. The absence of data and monitoring arrangements to track the progression of former Apprentices in HE is a major fault in management information systems. Apprenticeship providers are currently not expected to collect data on their outcomes of Apprentices other than achievement, yet comprehensive data on longer terms outcomes including employability and progression will enable the development of measures taken to address them.

Finally, more significant partnerships between training providers, employers and HE providers would, amongst other things, help ensure former Apprentices have better access to information about alternative models of HE to help them develop a clear vision of occupational success.

8.6.2 Innovative HE support and delivery

The engagement of a diverse HE student population with vocational background and occupational experiences is not an effortless task for academic and institutions and greater consideration must be given to the responsiveness of HE provision in engaging and supporting students. There is a need for academic and HE providers to acknowledge students' personal and workplace circumstances and endeavour to provide an environment which helps ensure students are able to maximise their HE experience.

A system of online peer mentoring could be adopted to help former Apprentices interested in progressing in their learning and careers. Participants in this study demonstrated that first-hand knowledge of the experience of HE through social relationships helped to break down barriers to engagement. Opportunities to engage with Apprenticeship peers within the industry may encourage greater numbers to consider progression. Furthermore, Apprentices may benefit from a mentor, and such support should not be dependent on personal workplace relationships but available across work-based learning environments. Within HE greater pastoral and academic support,

particularly from HE staff with a practice or work-based background, may help students better manage the competing demands of their workplace and their HE programme and assist in developing a more transparent dialogue between academia and employment. The influence of peer support and the development of course communities is also important to becoming a student. HE providers could better support an environment that helps develop peer support systems and learning communities particularly for part-time students who are relatively isolated from their immediate peer group.

8.7 Future research direction

This thesis highlights a range of potential avenues for future research into Apprentice progression to HE. It is essential that work in this field explore the way HE is perceived by individuals with vocational backgrounds, with regard to their wider lives and biographies in addition to the more traditional methods, which focus on how HE views non-traditional students. In light of Apprenticeship policy changes (See sections 2.2 and 2.3), there is arguably the need for further research into supporting Apprentices to consider HE and in recognising their unique contribution to the HE learning experience. It will also be necessary for future research in this field to explore the impact of the current government Apprenticeship policy on progression rates to HE and progression within the Apprenticeship family.

The research study upon which this thesis is predicated resulted in a broad 'sample' of HE providers and programmes. It would be useful for future research to compare experiences based on different types of HE provision. A study of this nature could help to understand the relationship between subject choices and their intended career pathways and the manner in which these are linked. The approach would also provide greater insight into the modes and delivery of HE programmes which are better able to meet the needs of vocational learners. Many of the participants have entered HE to up-skill to increase or update their existing knowledge and skills and to continue an upward career trajectory. In this sense, it would be interesting to study longitudinally the impact that HE has on the professional and career outcomes of vocational learners.

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Appendices

Apprentice to Graduate: A study into the the progression experience of Advanced Apprentices

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Welcome

Hello, I am Ali Rouncefield-Swales. I am a PhD student at the University of the West of England and **my research study is exploring apprentices who progress to Higher Education.**

The survey is targeted at higher education students who have completed an Advanced Apprenticeship in the past four years. The purpose of this survey is gather some background information about potential participants.

I will be following up this survey with in-depth interviews. At the end of the survey you can indicate if you might be interested in helping with this aspect.

Your response will be treated confidentially, but please feel free to leave blank any questions which you would rather not answer.

Completing the form

- This questionnaire will take you around 15 minutes to complete.
- You can come back to the questionnaire to complete it at a later stage.
- You can print a copy of your survey when you have finished. The option to print expires 15 minutes after you submit your answers to the final question.
- Once you click on CONTINUE you cannot return to an earlier page to amend answers.

If you would prefer to complete a paper version of this registration form, you can obtain one by contacting me on A.Rouncefield-Swales@uwe.ac.uk.

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Consent and Data Protection

All data collected in this survey will be *held anonymously and securely*. No personal data is asked for or retained.

Only the researcher will have access to the information you provide.

This study is independent of your institution and course of study. All data will be stored in a password protected electronic format.

By **clicking on the CONTINUE button you acknowledge that you have read this information and agree to participate** in this research. You are **free to withdraw** your participation at any time.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact the researcher at A.Rouncefield-Swales@uwe.ac.uk.

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Demographic information

In this section we would like you to provide us with some information about yourself.

Your apprenticeship

This next question aims to gather information about the apprenticeship you have completed.

1. Have you recently (within the past four years) completed an Advanced Apprenticeship (level 3)?

Yes No

If yes, what framework (subject) did you study?

i. If yes, what year did you complete your Advanced Apprenticeship?

If you have not completed an Advanced Apprenticeship in the last four years we would like to thank you for your time. Unfortunately, you do not meet the criteria for this study at this time. We will not be asking you to complete any further questions. Please click on the EXIT SURVEY.

We wish you the very best for your course!

About you

In this section I would like you to provide us with some information about yourself.

2. What is your Gender?

[More Info](#)

- Male Female

3. What is your age?

- 18 - 20
 21 - 25
 26 - 35
 36 - 45
 46 - 50
 Over 50

4. What do you feel best describes your racial/ethnic identity?

- White - English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British
 White - Irish
 White - Gypsy or Irish
 White - Other
 Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups - White and Black Caribbean
 Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups - White and Black African
 Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups - White and Asian
 Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups - Other Mixed
 Asian/Asian British - Indian
 Asian/Asian British - Pakistani
 Asian/Asian British - Bangladeshi
 Asian/Asian British - Chinese
 Asian/Asian British - Other Asian

- Black/African/Caribbean/Black British - African
- Black/African/Caribbean/Black British - Caribbean
- Black/African/Caribbean/Black British - Other Black
- Other Ethnic Group - Arab
- Other Ethnic Group - Any Other Ethnic Group
- Prefer not to say

5. Do you consider yourself to be disabled or have an other health/medical impairment? (If yes, please specify in the 'other' box)

Yes No

If yes, please specify:

I am most interested in finding out more information about your 'household'. In using the term 'household' I am referring to:

- Your own home if you live by yourself or with your own family
- Your parental home if you continue to live with parents
- Your parental home if you live with parents outside of term time

6. Who else lives with you in your household?

7. What is the postcode of your household?

8. In your household, what is the occupation of the main wage earner?

9. Has anyone in your immediate family studied within higher education?
(select all that apply)

- Yes, one of my parents/carers
- Yes, both my parents/carers
- Yes, one or more of my siblings
- None
- Don't know

Previous education and qualifications

In this section I would like to ask you a little bit about your school and/or college education and qualifications.

10. Have you achieved GCSEs or equivalent qualifications (e.g. CSE, O Level, BTEC Level 2, NVQ Level 2, Apprenticeship Level 2)?

Yes No

If yes, what level 2 qualifications do you have and how many?

Higher Education Experience

The following section asks questions about your current higher education course and experience.

11. What higher education qualification are you currently studying?

Honours degree (e.g. BA, BSc) Foundation degree (e.g. FdA, FdSc) Higher National Certificate / Diploma (HNC, HND) Higher Apprenticeship

12. What subject is your higher education course?

13. Are you studying this course full or part-time?

- Full-time Part-time

14. What year of study are you?

- Year 1
 Year 2
 Year 3
 Year 4
 Year 5 or more

Participation in interviews

Thank you for completing this short survey.

The next stage of the research involves participating in three face-to-face interviews (each nine months apart). These will explore your experience of transition from work based learning to higher education and how you feel your prior knowledge and skills are recognised within teaching and learning of higher education programmes.

15. If you are interested in find out more information about the interviews please leave your full name:

Please also leave an email address: (one which you check regularly)

i. If you would prefer to be contacted by telephone, please leave a contact number:

Apprentice to Graduate: A study into the the progression experience of Advanced Apprentices

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Thank you

Thank you for completing this short survey, your participation in this research is greatly appreciated.

If you would like any further information about this study please contact me on A.Rouncefield-Swales@uwe.ac.uk.

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Appendix Two: Apprentices participants

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Disability	Ethnic origin	Family exp HE	POLAR3 ⁷⁷	Advanced Apprenticeship	Other Level 3 qual	HE qual	HE subject	Mode of study	Employment status
Claire Lambert	36-45	Female	None	White British	Parent and sibling	2	Clinical healthcare support	A Levels	Honours degree	Children's Nursing	FT	PT
Elizabeth Morris	18-20	Female	None	White British	None	3	Business and Administration	AS Levels	HNC/D	Business and Management	PT	FT
Gethen Williams	18-20	Male	None	White British	Parent and sibling	5	Sporting Excellence	A Levels	Honours degree	Psychology	FT	None
India James	18-20	Female	None	White British	None	2	Business and Administration	None	Honours degree	Business Studies	PT	FT
Jamie Whitefield	21-25	Male	None	White British	Sibling	2	Trowel Occupations	Specialist building site qualifications	Honours degree	Architectural Technology and Design	FT	PT
Liam Smith	26-35	Male	None	White British	None	3	Mechanical Engineering	BTEC NC	Foundation degree	Mechanical/Manufacturing Engineering	PT	FT
Lucille Taylor	18-20	Female	None	White British	Parent	2	Children and Young People	AS Levels	Honours Degree	Educational Studies	PT	FT
Lucy Dawson	21-25	Female	None	White British	None	2	Building Services Engineering	A Levels	Honours degree	Building Services	PT	FT

⁷⁷ POLAR3: Highlights a geographic wards young participation rates in higher education from quintile 1(low) - 5(high). Postcodes were checked in May 2013, using the HEFCE postcode checking tool: <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/postcode>.

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Disability	Ethnic origin	Family exp HE	POLA R3 ⁷⁷	Advanced Apprenticeship	Other Level 3 qual	HE qual	HE subject	Mode of study	Employment status
				h						Engineering		
Mo Fakhoury	18-20	Male	None	Mixed White and Asian	Parent and sibling	5	Sporting Excellence	Specialist Coaching	Honours degree	Civil and Structural Engineering	FT	PT
Nina Holliday	21-25	Female	None	White British	Sibling	2	Business and Administration	A Levels	Honours degree	Business Management in Practice	PT	FT
Paul Clark	21-25	Male	None	White British	Sibling	2	Mechanical Engineering	None	Honours degree	Aerospace Engineering	FT	None
Rose Poole	21-25	Female	None	White British	Sibling	2	Cultural and heritage venue operations	A Levels	Honours degree	Forensic Science	FT	None
Samuel Ramchurn	18-20	Male	None	Mixed Other	None	3	Business and Administration	A Levels	Honours degree	Law	PT	FT
Sarah Tomlinson	18-20	Female	Dyslexia	White British	Parent and sibling	4	Sporting Excellence	A Levels	Honours degree	Sports Therapy	FT	None
Simon Forshaw	21-25	Male	None	White British	None	1	Cultural and heritage venue operations	A Levels	Honours degree	History	FT	None
Tom Merrin	21-25	Male	None	White British	None	2	Electrical engineering	A Levels	HNC/D	Engineering	PT	Full-time

Appendix Three: Participant vignettes

Pseudonym	Claire Lambert
HE Course	Children's Nursing Honours Degree
Type of Institution	Modern University
Mode of Study	Full-time student

Claire is the oldest of the participants and is the only participant to have children; she first entered HE at the age of 19, having previously attended a girl's grammar school. She comes from a secure, middle-class background with her father having gained a degree and her mother completing a degree in social work when Claire was a child. Claire's first experience of University revolved around socialising and after graduating with a Third-Class Honours, she sought employment outside of her field of languages. Claire got married and had children, but became familiar with nursing after second daughter became severely ill. This sparked an interest in 'giving something back' and in search of a new project for when her children started school she decided to become a Children's Nurse. Claire's narrative highlights many communicative reflexive traits; her prime concern continues to be her family, and her entry to HE for the second time based around carefully planned events and a long-term vision of a caring role. She initially gained part-time employment as a healthcare assistant, acquiring valuable work experience while caring for her children. Her employer then supported Claire through her Apprenticeship which gave her sufficient experience and current qualifications to apply for the Degree.

Pseudonym	Elizabeth Morris
HE Course	Business and Management HNC
Type of Institution	Further Education College
Mode of Study	Part-time

Elizabeth considers herself as academically bright but developed a dislike for the school environment. She comes from working class background; her mum works in the laboratories in the local hospital, and her dad was forced to retire early due to ill health. Lucy did not have a 'project' in mind for when she completed school but due to her mother's influence continued

into the sixth form to study A Levels. Elizabeth struggled to engage with the style of learning and with the support of her mother, left after the first year with the idea to follow a vocational course at her local college. Elizabeth, like many others in the study, felt let down by the advice and guidance system but stumbles across an advertisement for Apprenticeships at the local authority. Elizabeth frequently displays communicative traits; she has a strong connection with her small family and is driven by job security and financial stability. Elizabeth views her degree in very straightforward instrumental terms, as a pathway to a career and financial security.

Pseudonym	Gethen Williams
HE Course	Psychology Honours Degree
Type of Institution	Elite University
Mode of Study	Full-time

Gethen is the most secure middle-class of the cohort; his father is a head teacher of a secondary school and sixth form and his mother is a TV producer. Both his parents and his sister have attended elite universities to obtain their degrees and have a very classed understanding to HE participation. Like Mo and Sarah, he studied for the Advanced Apprenticeship in Sporting Excellence after he was spotted by a professional football club. Gethen was supported by parents to pursue a football career, but in ensuring he had other options should this not flourish his father arranged for him to study A Levels alongside the Apprenticeship. Gethen's pursuit of HE was much more like the traditional HE student in which HE is part of a normal biography (Du Bois-Reymond, 1998). Gethen achieved excellent A Level results and found the culture of the Apprenticeship clashed with his values and identity. Upon being released from football, he crossed over to play rugby which he continued to play throughout university, becoming president of the university rugby club. Gethen did not have a perceived outcome beyond his university degree, but he entered with a firm understanding that getting a degree is not enough (Tomlinson, 2008). He attaches vital importance to extra-curricular activities and successfully utilises his family's and social network to access internships which he views as enhancing his employability.

Pseudonym	India James
HE Course	Business Certificate of HE

Type of Institution Other HEI

Mode of Study Part-time

India comes from a working-class background with strong family relations. She actively sought an Apprenticeship opportunity as a means of 'earning and learning' a strong feature within her family. She displays strong communicative reflexive traits; she has a high degree of 'contextual continuity' seen within her strong family relationships and places her friends and family as her ultimate concern. Her work role allows her to dovetail her work life, with friendships, relationships and her hobbies of cheerleading coaching. While she expresses a desire to move forward in her job role, she also has a marked degree of contentment with her 'modus vivendi' and does not see the value in gaining a full degree.

Pseudonym Jamie Whitefield

HE Course Architectural Technology Honours Degree

Type of Institution Modern University

Mode of Study Full-time

Jamie's biography is protracted and complex; he comes from a working-class background, grew up in an affluent city and attended an all boy's secondary school. By his admission, he did not recognise the value of education and lacking the focus on where his future might lead he left school disenchanted with education. Jamie experienced fragmented post-compulsory education transitions defined by periods of unemployment and temporary, low wage and low skilled work. Seeking financial security, he stumbled into a Bricklaying Apprenticeship at age 18 and became highly valued within his community of practice. Working within the realm of building design opened a work 'project' and over time as discontent with his employment grew he dreamed of a professional design career. Encouraged and guided by those around him, he utilised his work experience to gain a place at university. Commitment and dedication define his participation in HE as a means of securing his 'project', a professional career within architectural design.

Pseudonym	Liam Smith
HE Course	Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering Foundation Degree
Type of Institution	Further Education College
Mode of Study	Part-time

Liam found his way into an Advanced Apprenticeship after a year of A level study. He commenced A Levels not knowing what his other options were but he did not enjoy the academic style of learning and had no ambition to progress to HE. He was highly influenced by a strong family and peer network with low university participation and a strong connection Apprenticeships and local employment. Tom, like Paul and others, experienced an ‘expansive’ Apprenticeship, over the course of four years became an integral part of a community of practice, gained cross-company experiences with access to a broad range of experiences before focusing on a specialism. However, after several years of working Liam became frustrated by what he perceived as a lack of progression and fulfilling career opportunities in the ‘blue collar’ department where he was based. Encouraged by his partner, who had herself attended university, he was motivated him to explore opportunities to gain higher level qualifications, and like others, he views his degree in instrumental terms, as a pathway to a career and financial security.

Pseudonym	Lucille Taylor
HE Course	Education Studies Foundation Degree
Type of Institution	Modern University
Mode of Study	Part-time, Work-based

Lucille’s biography reveals a frustration with formal learning. She comes from an insecure middle-class background, her mother gained a degree before having children but did not gain employment in a professional field until she became a teacher when Lucille finished secondary school. Lucille enjoyed school and had a focused ambition to work with children. However, her mother’s influence led her to study A Levels but she did not engage with the style of learning and against her mother’s wishes left sixth form after the first year. She was successful, through

utilising her social network, to secure an Apprenticeship in a local pre-school. Lucille's 'project' primarily centred on working with children and despite feeling professionally fulfilled, she was keen to increase her job security and financial stability. Lucille views her Degree in very straightforward instrumental terms, as a pathway to a career in teaching and financial security.

Pseudonym	Lucy Dawson
HE Course	Building Services Engineering Honours Degree
Type of Institution	Modern University
Mode of Study	Part-time

Lucy is academically talented and at school was surrounded by peers who followed a pathway to HE. She initially went against her parents' wishes to reject HE for an Apprenticeship and is the only participant to break gender expectations in taking up an Advanced Apprenticeship in a male-dominated industry. Lucy's Apprenticeship had many features in common with an 'expansive' approach. Lucy's family feature strongly in her decision-making, she has many traits of a communicative reflexive and values both the advice of her family and her work colleagues. Commitment and dedication define her participation in HE as a means of securing her 'project', the credentials which will give her professional status.

Pseudonym	Mo Fakhoury
HE Course	Civil and Structural Engineering Honours Degree
Type of Institution	Elite University
Mode of Study	Full-time

Mo shares his sporting prowess and academic talent with his siblings, he achieved excellent GCSEs and was spotted by a professional football club and offered the chance to study an Advanced Apprenticeship. Mo was supported by parents to pursue a football career, which was a source of close family bonding as his twin brother was also offered a contract with the same club. The commitment to education permeates the family's values and decisions, and in many ways, Mo is a typical middle-class student with a strong family tradition of HE participation. Mo and his parents formulated an alternative 'project' to football with Mo and his brother taking on the further study during the Apprenticeship to gain additional UCAS

points. Mo's narrative illuminates the strength of the interconnections between the role of his network of intimacy, support from wider professionals and his emerging identity in the development and experience of an alternative career trajectory. He gained entry to university through a Foundation Year choosing to progress to an elite institution away from home. Mo's long-term aspiration is to become self-employed and he views a career in engineering as facilitating that ambition. Over the course of his degree undertook a range of extra-curricular activities as a means of enhancing his employability. Unlike Gethen he did not have a social network which could facilitate access to high-quality internship so found other ways to gain a positional advantage in the competition for jobs. Mo continued to play semi-professional football, worked in a variety of peer support capacities for the University and undertook a life-changing study abroad year.

Pseudonym	Nina Holliday
HE Course	Business Management in Practice Honours Degree
Type of Institution	Further Education College
Mode of Study	Part-time, work based

Nina's biography implies an early rejection of HE, influenced by her social network in which HE participation is low. Nina is the oldest of five children from a matriarchal family after her father left and moved to America. Despite her strong family ties in a moment of autonomous reflexivity she rebelled against her mother, rejected academic study and took a more vocational pathway into hairdressing "to see if I liked it". Despite enjoying the experience, the pressure from her mother increased, and she went on to complete A Levels but certain of her rejection of HE she explored options to gain employment locally. Through her social network, she became aware of a well-respected local employer who offered Advanced Apprenticeships and was successful in gaining a place. In many ways, the Apprenticeship was 'expansive', she was part of a significant community of practice and was given the chance to complete a Foundation Degree. Despite her initial rejections of HE, Nina enjoyed working and studying and used her success to 'top up' to a full degree. Nina talks about leaving her job and that the 'piece of paper' her degree offers will open other doors but continues to remain in the same role.

Pseudonym	Paul Clark
HE Course	Aerospace Engineering Honours Degree
Type of Institution	Modern University
Mode of Study	Full-time

Paul left school at 16 with average GCSE results and was encouraged by his father to follow his brother's footsteps into an Apprenticeship and the family tradition of engineering. Like others in the study, he gained an Apprenticeship at a well-respected company with an established 'expansive' training programme. Paul's Apprenticeship was a positive experience, with structured, holistic training where he was involved in a broader community of practice. During the third year of the four-year Apprenticeships, he started to consider the possibility of HE. His brother had applied to university and this fuelled Paul's interest as he was frustrated by the thought of doing, what he perceived to be, a 'low-value job' for the rest of his life. Together with a peer from the Apprenticeship, he researched the options with the view that a degree might facilitate access to a career in "something a bit more critical". Paul entered HE without a view of a long-term view of his future career but sees his degree as being a passport to a professional engineering career. Paul views his HE participation in a very instrumentalist sense, in that the degree will open doors to a more fulfilling professional career.

Pseudonym	Rose Poole
HE Course	Forensic Anthropology and Crime Scene Investigation Honours Degree
Type of Institution	Modern University
Mode of Study	Full-time

Rose entered HE after her Apprenticeship to complete the Degree she had started several years previous. Despite first entering HE at age 19, her educational trajectory is fragmented and non-linear. She left school with only a handful of GCSEs and realised she required a science qualification to so she could become a makeup artist. Studying science at college was a turning point and led her to recognise, with the help of her tutor, a flair for forensics. Rose realigned her ambitions and gained a place to read forensics at university, a time which was distressingly cut short due to her mother's illness. Rose returned home to care for her mother, but was

unable to secure her return to university and worked in a series of low-paid, temporary positions. Rose secured an Apprenticeship in a local museum and through a fortuitous series of events secured a place to complete the final year of her degree. Rose approach to university second time around with a ruthless perfectionism, commitment and dedication almost to her breaking point which created a tunnel vision that meant she has not been able to define a possible future self and occupational ideal for the future.

Pseudonym	Samuel Ramchurn
HE Course	Law Honours Degree
Type of Institution	Other HEI
Mode of Study	Part-time

Samuel, despite a working-class background without any history of HE participation, was set on becoming a lawyer from a very young age. He was extremely successful in school, gained top grade A Levels, and after attending an HE summer school, gained a place at an elite university to read Law. Unable to reconcile the financial expenses of going to university and chose to decline his place and follow the riskier pathway of an Apprenticeship with the intention of finding an alternative route to a Law career. Samuel was introduced to an alternative model of HE through a work mentor and embarked on a distance learning Law Degree while working full-time. In many ways, Samuel's initial rejection of HE has reaped dividends, he has gained substantial professional experience, and his participation in HE means he can enhance his career prospects without any associated debt.

Pseudonym	Sarah Tomlinson
HE Course	Sports Therapy Honours Degree
Type of Institution	Modern University
Mode of Study	Full-time

Sarah's biography mirrors a more traditional entrant to HE, coming from a secure, middle-class background. Sarah's possible self was to become a synchronised swimmer, demanding a huge amount of dedication and led to her compete in the National Championships and train for the GB Olympic team. Sarah's Advanced Apprenticeship in Sporting Excellence facilitated her to

study A Levels as the knowledge component thereby broadening her future options. Sarah’s pursuit of HE was much more like the traditional, ‘archetypal’ HE student, with her biography implying that HE was part of a normal and expected biography (Du Bois-Reymond, 1998). Sarah’s ambition was to become a physiotherapist, an ambition whereby she could do “something where you would help someone in some way” and which would allow her to integrate her others concerns of sport and fitness. The demands of her Apprenticeship coupled with her severe Dyslexia impacted on her A Level results and led her into a Sports Therapy Degree through clearing.

Pseudonym	Simon Forshaw
HE Course	History Honours Degree
Type of Institution	Modern University
Mode of Study	Full-time

Simon had a challenging and difficult upbringing. He left home aged 16 and began living in supported housing before gaining a permanent address and going on to study A Levels supporting himself by working as a part-time cleaner. Simon’s friends and their families became his social network; his cleaning job at a local artisan pottery came about through a friend who worked there. During his A Levels, he began to lose interest in academic learning and withdrew his place at university to read Classics. Through his cleaning job he was told about an Advanced Apprenticeship the organisation was offering in Cultural and Heritage Venue Operations and was successful in his application. The Apprenticeship did not turn into a permanent position, and upon completion Simon relocated with some friends. Realising he needed to feel productive, Simon applied to university through clearing and was offered a place to read History. Simon believes his degree will open doors to a professional career.

Pseudonym	Tom Merrin
HE Course	Electrical and Electronic Engineering Higher National Certificate
Type of Institution	Further Education College
Mode of Study	Part-time

Tom like others in the study, found his way into his Advanced Apprenticeship after A Levels. Tom's biography implies an early rejection of HE, influenced by a strong social network with low HE participation and a strong connection to the local area. Tom grew up by the sea, and his family have a strong connection to seafaring, his brother is a sailmaker, one grandfather was a fisherman and the other worked on the docks alongside his father. Tom experienced an 'expansive' Apprenticeship, over the course of four years became an integral part of a community of practice, gained cross-company experiences with access to a broad range of experiences before focusing on a specialism in electrical engineering. Tom has little desire to leave the area permanently but having seen peers and others within his community of practice work on yachts abroad is keen to explore this while he has no ties. This has motivated him to explore opportunities to gain higher level qualifications, and he views his degree in instrumental terms, as a pathway to a career and financial security.

Appendix Four: First Interview Topic Guide

Interview information and topic guide:

The initial interview will take a life history narrative approach and as such will be led by the participant from an initial question 'Can you tell me about your life?'

In initial interviews where the participant is more reluctant to discuss their experience at length the following topics will be used as a guide. These themes will also be used in subsequent interviews to help guide the interview to explore questions pertaining to the study and its interest.

Can you tell me about your experience of education prior to HE?

- Experiences of school – generally, teachers, learning, achievement
- Early educational influences – positive/negative
- Details of Apprenticeship(s)
- Experience of Apprenticeship – positive, negative,
- Non-completion/non-achievement
- Vocational vs. academic – influence, learning styles
- Early career/progression aspiration

Can you tell me about your routes into higher education?

- Qualifications/experience before entering higher level study
- Factors influencing decision to apply to enter higher level study, choice of institution, choice of course, mode of study and timing of entry
- Consideration of alternative choices

Can you tell me about what motivated and supported you to progress to higher level study?

- Role of information, advice and guidance
- Role of training provider, family, colleagues, peers and employer
- Career progression

Can you tell me about any barriers you may have encountered in progressing?

- Structural
- Personal
- Academic
- How barriers have been addressed

Can you tell me about your experiences of higher level study?

- Preparedness for higher level study

- Enthusiasm/doubts about higher level study
- Reflections on study mode
- Support from institution, employer, social networks
- Financial issues
- Work and family commitments
- Future plans and aspirations

Can you tell me more about your experience of or reflection on HE level teaching, learning and assessment?

- Difficult/rewarding aspects of higher level study
- Recognition and value of prior experience
- Comparison with other students

Can you tell me about what impact of HE study has had on your life and relationships?

- Changes to life outside college
- Changes to relationships – specific examples
- Changes to self
- Views of others
- Reasons for above

Can you tell me about your future plans?

- Career plans
- Life in 10 years' time
- Changes to plans since starting course

Appendix Five: Consent Form

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Project Title: Apprentice to Graduate: A narrative study of the progression experience of Advanced Apprentices

Researcher's name: Alison Rouncefield-Swales

Supervisor's name: Richard Waller

Research Aim The study will explore the experiences of apprentices who have made the transition to higher education. The researcher is interested in the transition experience from work-based learning to higher education, how you feel your prior knowledge and skills are recognised within teaching and learning of higher education programmes and the role of social/personal networks in decisions and experiences.

Involvement You have been asked to participate due to your unique experience of influencing and supporting an individual who has progressed to higher education after completing an Apprenticeship. We are requesting involvement in one telephone interview.

- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it. I am satisfied with the information I have been given.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.
- I understand that my responses will be kept confidential and anonymous and that I will not be directly identified.
- I understand that identification through unique experiences poses a risk. This risk has been fully explained.
- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published
- I understand that I will be audiotaped during the interview.
- I understand that data will be stored on the researcher's computer in a password-protected folder. Where there are hard copies of the data, such as transcripts of interviews, these will be stored in a locked cabinet to which only the researcher has access.
- I understand that in an extreme case, the research supervisor or examiner may request to listen to the audio tape.
- I understand that I may contact the researcher or supervisor if I require further information about the research.

I consent to participate in this research study and I agree with all the above statements.

Signed (Participant)

Print name **Date**

Contact details

Researcher: Alison Rouncefield-Swales, Email: Alison.Rouncefield-Swales@uwe.ac.uk

Supervisor: Richard Waller, Associate Professor, Email: Richard.Waller@uwe.ac.uk

Appendix Six: Participant Information Sheet

Apprentice to Graduate: A narrative study of the progression experience of Advanced Apprentices

Participant Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in a PhD research study. Before you decide whether to participate it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us 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.

What is the purpose of the study?

The study will explore the experiences of apprentices who have made the transition to higher education. The researcher is interested in your experience of transition from work-based learning to higher education and how you feel your prior knowledge and skills are recognised within teaching and learning of higher education programmes. The study will be completed by December 2015.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been asked to participate due to your unique experience of progressing to higher education after completing an Apprenticeship. We are requesting involvement in three face-to-face interviews, conducted nine months apart. We will also maintain contact online between the two interviews. We will be conducting this research with a total of twenty participants.

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. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not in any way affect your study experience.

What will happen to me if I take part and what do I have to do?

If you decide to take part we will ask you to participate in three in-depth face-to-face interviews where we will ask you to discuss your educational background, route into higher education, motivation/support for higher level study, perception of any barriers you may have encountered, experiences of, and routes through, higher level study, impact of studies and future plans.

The interview will take place at your college or university site and will probably last about 1½ hours depending on how much time you have available, and how much information you want to share. I will record the interviews with your permission. The interview will be transcribed and you will be given a copy for your information – you can choose whether or not to read this. Your account will then be written up into a storied format.

During the phase of the third interview I will be asking five participants to take part in a further aspect of the study, which will be to nominate two or three individuals to also take part in an interview. These people might be a family member, friend, employer or course tutor.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

All information provided by you will be kept confidential at all times. All the information you provide will be anonymised and will be treated as confidential. All responses to questions and background information provided by you will be anonymised. Only the researcher will have access to the information you provide.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There is a risk that due to your unique experience your account might be recognised. I will minimise this by anonymising all background information you provide and by also providing you with a copy of the interview transcript to ensure you are happy with the information which is being disclosed about your experience.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there may be no personal benefits to your participation in this study, the information you provide will contribute to the understanding of apprentices' experience of progressing to higher education, an area which is currently under-researched.

What if something goes wrong?

If you wish to complain, or have any concerns about any aspect of the way you have been approached or treated during the course of this study, you can contact my supervisor Richard Waller, Associate Professor, Email: Richard.Waller@uwe.ac.uk.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

We plan to use the results of this study for a PhD thesis. The results from this analysis may also be available in one or more of the following sources; papers in peer-reviewed academic journals and presentations at conferences. If you are interested to know more about the results, you can contact me for further information.

Contact for further information

Researcher: Ali Rouncefield-Swales, Alison.Rouncefield-Swales@uwe.ac.uk

Director of Study: Richard Waller, Richard.Waller@uwe.ac.uk

Appendix Seven: Sample Interview Transcription

Samuel Ramchurn – First Interview

Total Length: 120 min

The interview took place towards the end of Samuel's first year of HE study. I met him at his home after he had finished work for the day. He had been late home from work due to bad traffic and was quickly eating dinner as I arrived.

Samuel started to talk about his Apprenticeship before I had the chance to ask a question:

Samuel: The things is when you finish your Apprenticeship it stops there you don't get any further support to say you know this is what you can do next and this is what you can do, and this is the route you can go, and if you want to do further studies in the field then you can do this. You don't get that, but in colleges you do your A levels, I did my A levels, and then I got told uni's the next route, you can do this, this and this, I didn't get told about anything else, so that's the focus.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about yourself?

Samuel: Basically from the start, I always aimed to be a lawyer, kind of a barrister, solicitor route, so that's the thing I've always wanted to do since I was a little person. So yeah that's always been my route. Having that in mind I've always known my direction, you know. Go through school, college, uni etc., etc. you know the LPC practice course then... I've know the direction cos that's the direction you go to get there, so I went through school, got my GCSEs, got all the ones I wanted went into do my A Levels at [name] college and I knew the A levels I'd to get, I'd to high A levels to be in with a chance to go to the good uni's so my aim was always [elite university]. It's a beautiful uni and I went there for a summer school back in the day, then was when I was in school actually. It was an amazing experience, and that's what persuaded me towards that, and I know there was the big, London School of Economics, Kings College London, the big law schools, Oxford, Cambridge, but they just didn't appeal to me, and there was the cost as well.

I managed to get my A Levels; I got Law, Business, Accounting and a bit of French and Latin, it was a bit of a mixture. But on my mum's side, they're from Mauritius, so they speak Creole which is a broken French so that was the reason I went down the French route cos actually it's good to be able to speak to relatives. The others were, cos I've always had a business mind, I've always enjoyed business side of things, so it wasn't the most academic I could have done Physics, maths and those things and I enjoy those subjects but I just wanted to do something I was really interested in, and I could get to where I wanted by doing those. I could have done Math's, and I enjoyed maths at GCSE but it just kind of didn't fall in place. Basically, I got my A Levels, got into [name] University, filled out all the admissions stuff, got through to a couple of months before and you know, sorting out flats and accommodation, and then

it just hit me, the cost of university. And I couldn't put that, the main thing was I couldn't put that burden on my parents, they were saying 'oh we'll help you out' and this that and the other but it comes down to thousands and thousands, and I think after a lot of deliberation and a lot of thinking I actually thought no. I turned down [university] in the end. And I know you get funding, but its juts the kind of, it was just the thing in my mind that I couldn't put the burden on my parents and the debt.

I didn't know at this time that there were other routes anyway, but so, it's a weird thing for me just casually to quit just like that, I turned it down and went into a bit of part-time work, just working in a supermarket. But I did that for a few months, and I knew I always wanted to carry on doing law, so in these few months I was trying to find another option and find options to develop myself in other ways, so that's when I applied for a few jobs and I got an Apprenticeship in [Local Authority] and that was in Business Administration so again it was something linked with what I enjoy, business. But it was in a team called data protection and freedom of information, so it was kind of legal linked. So that's why I kind of went for that route. That was a year, an 18-month Apprenticeship, that was Level 3, so I enjoyed doing that and halfway through I managed to find the [other HEI] course, so that's where I kick-started the law degree and got the ball rolling on that one. That was halfway through the Apprenticeship. Because I was always quite keen on the Apprenticeship and wanted to get it done, cos I had the law to do as well, I managed to do it in 6 months. I managed to do it in the minimum time possible, so actually just after my degree started, before I got into the bulk of the degree.

I think after 12 months, we had a company [company name], and I got offered a job in the procurement team of [company name], which was a new team. So that was my first sight of procurement, but again it's a different route to law but in the meantime, I was still doing my law degree and you know the way I linked it, I try to link everything, is procurement is dealing with a lot of contracts, you're writing contracts for suppliers, you are putting in these terms and conditions. So, I got the job, and one of my objectives was to write the terms and conditions for our purchasers, so I thought that was a great opportunity to learn contract law, and since... when I began that, I decided that contract law was my route, not criminal law, so I was trying to work out what I could specialize in, and that's where I kind of worked out that contract law is the way to go. So, I was there two years, obviously I finished my Apprenticeship and became a buyer, and then we went through a massive restructure and I managed to keep my job, which was good and I started, after the first year they wanted us to be more specialized in the role, so I started doing a CIPS, which is a Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply, whilst doing a law degree... So yeah, I picked up the CIPS and that's because I do like learning, I like to learn the intricacies of the role, I've got through my Level 4, and in a way each level... if you say you're are Level 4 CIPS qualified they can see you have some element of knowledge, so you can do Level 4 and then give up. But then I get to a point where I do something and I don't want, I want to

finish it, I can't just leave it aside. So, I'm doing Level 5, I'm halfway through that at the moment, so yeah...

So back to where we were, so after two years I got offered a job at Lloyds banking group doing procurement there as well so I'm now in sourcing there, it's quite a massive change, it's more of a challenge, I love the fact it's a challenge. So, I've been there for a few months, doing procurement there as well and I've continued doing my CIPS, but this time I'm funding it myself and same with the law as well, I'm self-funding that. It's not as much [other HEI] as the uni route and you still get. I know some people see it, there are different views some people see it as quite prestigious because you are doing it whilst working full-time. Obviously, I've got to have time to see the girlfriend as well, so it's quite a busy life. Cos I'm always that determined to do it, I want to get them finished and I want to make the best I can do. So, I know it's painful but at the same time it's worth, because it's what is see as a big thing and a law degree it looks good on the CV. Even if I don't follow my law route for a bit I'm in a good place, cos depending on opportunities I've got a legal team next to me as well, and that's where I am now.

Interviewer: Can you tell me more about your family?

Samuel: There are three boys, there's my little brother, my older brother – who's a half-brother and then an older, older brother who's another half-brother as well – so four boys. One works in one of those places you can't speak about; he works for the government. My little brother is in an Apprenticeship at the moment as well; he's 20, he was a late bloomer like me, cos I was a late bloomer. Cos, I went to college and then decided to have my year of part-time work whilst I rethought about what was going on, I went in to my Apprenticeship late so I know you usually get them when you come straight out of school, like my girlfriend did, cos that's a route before college, but my brother and me we both went to college, he did his business a BTEC in Business and then I don't think uni was something he wanted to do. Cos my parents are not those kind of pushy parents, I am potentially going to be the first one to graduate from uni, cos that was something I've always wanted to do. But they've never forced any of us or pushed any of us to go down that route. All they wanted was for us to have a good job and be secure in that way, and that's why they've always been quite good with that. He's doing an Apprenticeship at the moment in business, so he's following suit really. He's coming to the end now so I think he's looking for the next route. I'm trying to persuade him to go down the uni route but I know at the same time how much work it is and he's got to want to do it. I wouldn't say you should do it if you don't want to do it.

Interviewer: How did your parents feel about your decision?

Samuel: They didn't go to uni, my mum's a carer and my dad were in the police but he's retired, so I don't think they saw it as.... I remember the moment that I told them that I'd actually got in to uni and they were really excited, cos I was

really ecstatic as well. Yeah, it's beautiful, it's an amazing campus, it's an amazing uni, it's quite prestigious as well, it's got its merits and you know I was really happy. And then I think, I can't actually remember what happened, but I remember saying you know... I think I just made the decision that, I, I didn't tell them it was because of the cost cos then it would have been a guilt thing really, not that it was their burden to take. Anyway, I think I just said I don't think it's the right thing to do, and mum's really kind of always there, so we had the chat and I said it might potentially not be what I want to do and she was like 'ok, well if you don't want to do it, you don't want to do it and that's fine' and same as my dad he said he would be there for you. I remember I sent the email and turned it down.

Yeah, cos at that time I didn't have any other plans, erm it was just a case of, I went into the easiest thing possible, a customer service supervisor as [supermarket] which is just a kind of different route and I did it for the money whilst I could clearly think my head out for a bit and work out what was available and what was out there, other than... cos I knew the uni thing was always there, I could always potentially go back into it if I decided that. I knew that would be a bit harder cos I would have to justify that time off in personal statements, and I knew it would be a bit harder, but I think I've always thought what other stuff is out there. I've always been quite driven in a way that, I've never wanted to have a kind of average, I've always wanted to have a salary above my age, it's what I've kind of aimed for after I got my first Apprenticeship. After I realized I've got a door here. I think it as soon as you get your first Apprenticeship it's a door into other opportunities and that how I've got to the route of where I am now, and I know it's all because of that. And I know a lot of my friends who are coming out of uni now cos they are at that time now, and they are struggling, they are struggling to find jobs and they struggling to get into. Even in the position I am at now, they ask 'how have you got there?' 'How've managed that?' cos they don't understand that there's any other route, other than uni and that's the route they went. And they think actually you've got that and how did you get that without have a degree? It's more through experience, and I've had the two years of buying experience and I could show that I could learn on-site, which is what I was doing and it's still what I am doing. And work still finds it quite good that I'm doing and that I want to develop myself and that's a good way to do it. All back to the last question, I think they actually didn't react, as you'd imagine if they were quite adamant that that was my route. They were more supportive.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about your friendship group?

Samuel: They finished last year or this year, whichever term they went in, and yeah, a lot of them have finished now and they are going into jobs lower than me at the moment, which is a nice feeling in a way. They've got their degrees, granted they've done it and I've still got to do another year to go cos I've spread it out cos its part-time and I had to do the CIPS I had to spread it out

over the five years which you can have up to six years for law but I just wanted to get it done, but I knew I wouldn't get the best result if I did it over four years. So yeah they are all coming out and I think a lot of them are questioning how did you get to a position like that and they're finding the experience is the biggest part that they are struggling with, cos yeah they've got the knowledge and maybe sometimes they haven't got the knowledge because they've just got the knowledge of how something works but not how to put it into practice and I can say actually 'yeah I'm learning the knowledge as I go' and this CIPs, for example, I'm currently doing operations management, so I'm learning how I manage the works and what goes through his head and how he works us as a resource and how effectively us as a unit works. And I can say actually I'm learning that and I've put that into practice for two years, two and a half years. Whereas they've got this degree but they've got to get into, through that door first to be able to work their way up.

I think that's something that I've learnt through interviews that I've had is that the experience I've had with the job, I've learnt about the best ways to stand out, cos I've met these people, I've met the directors, the directors of the bank and what they look for, Cos it's a question I always ask you know what kind of stuff. And I've seen from LinkedIn how they've worked their way up and how they've got to where they are. So, you learn what kind of stuff makes you stand out and that's why I'm asking to do more presentations and stuff like that, so all these extra little bits you get to do, I can say I've done a presentation on this account and I made this purchase and I made this saving here, and I can put that on the CV and say this isn't practice this has substance. And I think that's why I've never regretted turning down uni, it's one thing I can say for a fact that I've never regretted turning it down. People ask, you know, if I'm happy with that decision and was it a bad thing, and no because the last what three years, four years, I've learnt so much more, I've met so many more people that actually I think I'm in a better standing than if I did. Because I would be coming out of uni about now and I think I'm in a better standing now. Yeah, I'm only on 25k but I think 25k is a lot more than a lot of people earn at that kind of age and I've only got that because I've learnt how to negotiate and I learnt what I needed to know to get what I needed to get and obviously I've always had that aim of being above my age, so I think that's the driving force. So, I'm already looking for the next opportunity. So, I've already put a slight finger in the door and that will be another jump up to the 30k, which would kind of keep me above my age. I know it sounds weird... That's what I aim to do after my degree is an MBA or something like that, cos obviously I've got my legal practice course, but I'd love to do the same thing as you and keep re-educating and keep learning something new. And I know I'm finding it painful at the moment but something like an MBA I'd love to do. Maybe I'll do my legal practice course and I don't know if I want to stop learning for a little bit and have a bit of time off or... but I've always aimed, I know for a fact I want to work abroad for a little bit, that's another one of my aims as well. Cos one of my seniors is from Australia and he's told me about

this stuff and maybe that an opportunity there or we've got offices in the states. So maybe, I know definitely in my twenties I definitely want to work abroad for a year or maybe a couple of years and so that's another kind of thing, but that will be after my degree anyway.

I know I'm saying all this about salary and I want to stay above my age but I've never seen salary as being the driving force because yeah, I'm above my age but when I'm working up in Gloucester or Bristol I'm spending up to £400 a month getting there so effectively I'm in the same amount that I was on before but it's the fact that yeah, I'm in Lloyds, I'm learning about the financial sector which from the public sector is a massive jump, the acronyms they use, crikey. The first day, I'd ask, and they have an index of acronyms; there is actually a booklet on acronyms. I love the fact that I'm learning every day and you know, it's such, compared to north Somerset its huge Lloyds is, the size of it, the vast size of the bank, there's load of people working for them and they are effectively my customers and I get to buy bank vaults, ATM or cash machines, I get to buy stuff like that, a wide variety. So, I went from buying care packages, services, demolitions, pay and display machines. I can honestly say that procurement isn't a thing I would have seen, as I said that's what I started off saying you know law was the thing I aimed at. But now I'm in completely different function, I can make the links which is what I always do, but it's not law and that's why I wonder, I always had that direction and its weird how things change but I still haven't pushed away the law thing and it's something I what I want to do. In the future, and it's what I've discussed with my manager there is a procurement law link, they're quite a big think as well and if I have a specialism in procurement and I have that professional qualification, which I doubt a lot of procurement lawyers do have, they just have the specialism they just have the law as it is. Then it kind of makes me a bit different.

I've aimed for that thing and I know all these little kinds of routes will eventually get me there and if I specialize in everything in the world, I just aim to be that standing out person which is why I network, to get to talk to these different people and prove myself. I know however people see it, it does work in your favour and now that Director level knows me they've passed that on to their colleagues and they kind of hear about you and I like that feeling, because that means that you are known and a door has potentially been opened and you can see a bit of light through that door.

I like learning, I say you know, I did ok in GCSE, I didn't get the best, I didn't get what I wanted to get, I wanted to get you know all As but I didn't get that, I got my Bs and As and a couple of A*s I didn't do amazing because I wasn't as fully into learning. If I went back into it now I know I would work a lot hard, but because I was more interested in the social aspect and I started boxing as well, I was more enjoying my time doing that, keeping fit and you know having a life. And then I started growing up, and I thought actually I want to give myself a good standing. So I've always had the goal, and I knew I could get it if I worked at an average level I could get average. I realized when I turned down

uni and got into the Apprenticeship that there's more out there. I enjoyed the business world and as opportunities come I don't like to turn them down unless I can justify turning them down, which is the law mind in it as well, I kind of look at both sides and say what outweighs what, it's annoying. The girlfriend hates it as well, when I'm in an argument. So, I didn't push myself until I got into the Apprenticeship and started realising what I could do and if I put my mind to it what I could do.

When I had that thinking time around, I knew that that was something I didn't want to end up doing, I know there are a lot of people that do that and they are happy but I couldn't work in the retail sector for the rest of my life. I always knew that that was something that I didn't want to do, it just felt. I know you can get into a little rut where that becomes the easiest thing and I know, I've got a lot of good friends that are doing that and they've got into the comfortable atmosphere that environment is something like home so they can just get up, go and do their job and they don't have anything to go home and worry about, just get it done and go home. But I knew, and I think it was more the Apprenticeship came up and it was more of a whim, I remember speaking to Jill, she was one of the people who interviewed me, she was the Apprenticeship person and I remember speaking to her after I got the job and she said about the hundreds of applications they'd got and when she said that and she said we got about 170 applications or something and then you were the final. From when she said that I thought they must have seen something in me and then I wanted to start proving myself, actually I can do this. I knew I could do it, but I wanted to prove actually I could better myself, and that's when I started learning all these extra things, it sounds nerdy but like advance stuff in excel, how to work systems, how to negotiate and persuade and these kinds of skills. I enjoyed it, I actually loved learning, and I think that's something that I didn't have before, I did it just because it was the route I had to do, I did GCSEs, I knew I had to get them, I knew I had to pass them all, and then A Levels were the same thing, I knew I had to get 3 As because that was what the uni's wanted and it was more, I think, I can say it wasn't something that I was pushing myself to, I just knew they needed it, so that's what I did. I got stuck in that little route, that little pathway you've got to do this... but then when I went into the Apprenticeship I knew that no one was forcing me to do this law degree in four years or three years, no one's forcing me to get this grade, no one is forcing me to do this piece of work and that's when I started to innovate and do things and because I was doing different things it was standing out.

Interviewer: Are you satisfied with your learning journey?

Samuel: I can honestly say, the business administration thing wasn't, that was something I knew I had to do, that's what I tried to get out of the way, I didn't want to be in admin kind of thing, I used the skills, I can honestly say I use the skills all the time, I learnt a hell of a lot in that Apprenticeship about the business world and it kind of got me in there. It was more what I was learning

and using in the job that kind of pushed me in that direction. The Apprenticeship was just something I knew I had to get done which was why I got it done as quickly as possible and got it out the way.

Interviewer: Can you tell me more about your pathway to HE?

Samuel: [Other HEI] was a big thing on the TV at the time, they were a lot of adverts so that, probably in the back of my mind sparked something, but it was more through research. The only thing I was worried about was the cost, but then I realised that you could be supported as, you can get study support through the [other HEI] as well. I think that opened it up, the fact that it was affordable and I knew I didn't have to put too much capital towards it to achieve it and so effectively it takes the pressure off. It meant that I could avoid my parents having to pay for anything, I knew that no one was forcing me to get the high grades because they wouldn't fund me if they didn't, so it was a more relaxing approach. When I started researching I only realised that actually that was available, if I would have known that, I don't know, but if I, I might if I'd have known that option then maybe I would have done that straight away, but obviously I can't tell what I would have done at the time. So that was something that through college, the [other HEI] was just something on the side that no one knew about. And honestly, I can say that I had different views of it as well, so I didn't see it as being a prestigious thing compared to... same as Apprenticeships, I didn't have a clue what they were about it just happened to be a job that was available and it was a job that paid well and was in the area. I didn't fully seek it out it was something that I found sort of and it was only after that that I realized all these things started falling into place. I was under the opinion that because I didn't have a degree, I wasn't able to open too many doors at a lot of the big companies and the only way to get in somewhere is to do an Apprenticeship. But I just had no clue, same as with the [other HEI] I just didn't realize it and I thought it wasn't prestigious but since I started doing it actually crikey this is hard work and I've spoken to my employers about it and they saw it as being quite a good thing, the skills that you get from it that they can see from it, working full-time and doing that, it only became apparent when I spoke to them about it. But things like that, it's more awareness, like when I started doing the Apprenticeship why I wanted to become an ambassador.

Interviewer: Did you have much support in applying for university?

Samuel: It was all off my own back, it was just through all my research and stuff like that I actually, I remember the time, I just took the plunge one time and pressed register and signed in all the bits, signed on the dotted line and then thought that's the only way I'm going to do it is if I just take the plunge. I did, and it's been great ever since.

Interviewer: Did you experience any barriers?

Samuel: The main barrier was because I took that time off the studying cos the

Apprenticeship and the degree is a completely different thing, there was no barrier in the sense of qualifications because I had qualifications, the A Levels and I think they looked at your age and your background to see if you were capable. I was capable on paper but because I had that time off I found it harder to get into it and trying to get into that sense of mind that I was teaching myself, and I can honestly say the first few months I didn't read as much as I could have, and I didn't get the grades that I could have got but that was because I was learning how to teach myself.

That was when I started thinking I didn't read as much as I needed to [at the start of the course] and a lot of it was from memory but then when I started getting into the meatier stuff then I started reading a bit more and getting my head down and doing it cos that I knew that actually it was going to be quite important. And it was at the start, and you just think it's the first year, what impact is it going to have? But it was more it impacted on getting myself into an environment where I come home and have to sit down and read you know in between making food and setting myself up for the next day. It was kind of getting myself into a routine, and that's when I changed and when I realized it. Even recently I've learnt I've got to get my head down a little bit more.

Interviewer: How did you employer respond?

Samuel: They've been quite responsive, when I told them about it, the two managers I have now, didn't interview me it was a different team who interviewed me, so they didn't know anything about me, I had to tell them about it [the degree] and the looks on their faces they were quite surprised, I don't think they saw it as something I would do and since then they've, I've sat down with the senior and he's said this is what you need to know if you want to get to this level you know to know this, this and this, you need to look up this, so they've been quite supportive. They've seen it as more something, they know I want to go on to the next level, the thing with the job I'm doing now, it's similar to the job I did before but I know there's a level above it that I know I can do, it's kind of a bit more complex but I know I can do it because it's what I've learnt and it's what I practices in my old job. So, I've not gone down a step just lost a few responsibilities but then I've gone into a different sector and a bigger organization so I couldn't just jump into an equivalent position but I'm building up knowledge of the financial sector that I didn't even know about, the private sector the way it works and the demands are completely different. In the end, I think the route I'm at I think the law doesn't really matter at the moment, I'm not going to put it in that part of my head where it doesn't matter but its less pressure because actually with the CIPS I'm doing really well and people I see, they are on 80/90k and I know there's a route if I just want to stick with CIPS. And law, I love law but if all else fails I've got a backup. I was speaking to [Apprenticeship Manager] because she's a coach and I did a bit of coaching with her, I was a coachee or whatever they call them, and we worked out, I've got all these drives, but my main drive is family. What we did in the things is look at all these routes and build up into what the core of what you

are aiming for and we worked out what my core was and its actually the family thing so even though want to get all this money and get all these jobs and get to this and that. Eventually, I want a family and I want to be able to give them a good lifestyle like I've had.

Interviewer: What impact has studying had on your life and relationships?

Samuel: It's affected my social life as it would because I have to account for time where I've got to study, and I know I can't do certain things so, for example, this weekend there's a Redbull thing, race, all my friends are going because they were racers, dirt bikes, motocross bikes and I know I can't do it because I've got my CIPS to do, and I've got to do a bit of reading for my law which is at the end of the month. So however much I'd love to do it and be in position to do it, because I'm the youngest, one is the year above me and one is 25, cos I'd to make this older friend as my friends went to uni effectively and they were people I'd met in boxing and that sort of thing, you know. Its affected my social life in the fact I can't do all these extra little bits, I've got to be driven and I've got a law tutorial on Saturday, so yeah, it's affected that. And the same with the girlfriend I've got to read an extra chunk of stuff before I go and see her and if I don't, I feel a bit worse that when I go and see her I've got my mind on other stuff and the same when it comes to essay writing time. That week up to, but I'm doing it for the whole week and you know I'm a bit more distant in those times because I've just got my head in a book or looking at law cases, so it has affected, I can tell its affected me. And the same with here the family, they see me I come through the door have a bit of food and then I go up, sit at my desk and study because I feel guilty if I'm just sitting here watching TV and wasting time and sometimes I know that they think that even though I'm in the building, in the house they don't see me.

They go on holiday [family] and they invite me and the girlfriend but it's coming up to exam time and I couldn't afford it and I've also got work that I want to have a good attendance on cos I know it looks good in the first six months so yeah it does, I can say it takes its toll but weighing it up the benefits are greater than the drawbacks, so that's what keeps me going. The fact that, that's what I tell everyone, you know I look at it and I say I've probably got a year and a half of my law degree and a year of my CIPs so I've got a lot to do but then I look after it, will I look back and think I've wasted that time? No, it will be a great place to be.

I've still got these social circles, it's not like I'm pushing away friends, I'm still maintaining these things, all-be-it... and sometimes I say yeah, I'm young, should I be going out? But ever since I was a boxer I didn't go out as much, you know when I was 18, around that time in college I was out every night but then I started getting down to the amateur boxing, getting into the work environment and actually I stopped drinking in excess and because I knew it ruins you for the week and I couldn't maintain my studying at the same time as working and going out and spending. Sometimes I look back and think actually am I wasting my youth? But then I don't see that as defining my youth

anymore, and I go out you know all the birthdays we go out and let loose because you have too. But then the same with all my friends, it's not defining us anymore, we are saving the money, in September we are doing route 66 so I'm going on holiday to do that and the same in February I went on holiday with the girlfriend and we went to Barbados, so the money I'm saving...

Interviewer: Has your view of your self changed?

Samuel: Yeah in many ways because as I was saying before, I have always been driven but I've become more driven and knowing what I can achieve through doing all these courses because its opened up opportunities and because these opportunities have opened I know more about what I can achieve and what's out there, so there are jobs I can achieve and now I've come to [bank] there are jobs I can achieve that are not too far, they are within reach and there's a pathway to get to those jobs. And I've changed in a sense that I know I've matured a lot more cos looking back before I was out every night, every weekend spending my money and yeah, I enjoyed those times and I'm not saying that I don't enjoy them anymore, just every birthday instead of every weekend. So, I know I've matured and maybe got older in that kind of sense and because of the friends I've got as well, because they are older. I've started flying lessons as well and that was something I've always wanted to do, cos a pilot was another thing I was thinking about but it was just the cost, the cost of that, so it's only flying lesson for PPL, private lessons but things like that I can afford now. As I say it's opened as I say, I know I can do that now. Its changed in a way I think, like the working abroad concept now I don't think it something stupid on the horizon that I'm just thinking about but not going to do, I know that what I'm saving for that, cos originally, I was saving for a mortgage but actually I've decided you know if I save more an actually be able to work abroad then maybe I'll be able to settle down abroad and do something like that. It's a possibility and as long as I keep a bit of money aside to be able to afford this [theoretical] mortgage cos I know that's what all us young kids are doing now, is bloody mortgages. I know it's there now, and I know that after my degree that's what I want to do, I've worked out that if I save a certain amount up to the end of my degree ill have enough to be able to work abroad for that year and even set up over there for a couple of years. Its changed me more than I would have known, I've seen a lot of changes. Because when is started boxing I became a lot more confident anyway and that when I was, it was around school time and my parents said they saw a massive changed then and then they've seen another massive change. They are the two big events that I know have changed me, boxing and then the Apprenticeship and uni course and I can notice the changes but I know I'm more willing to do stuff and more confidence to go out and speak to someone instead of standing back and watching someone else speak or when I'm in a lecture, I'm happier to say something so even if it's wrong, before it was all about an opinion and I don't want people to see me like that. Hence why sometimes I still have it, I occasionally mumble, but that's because that's how I

used to be, I used to be quite quiet, cos when I was little it's the colour kind of thing I used to get bullied a little bit, but then I started boxing and that changed and then in a way I've opened up as I've got older and I know everyone does as they mature, but I think those of mine defining points and that's what changed me. They've given me a little spark that's actually forced me to change, and I think it's changed in a good way.