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**Connected Identities**  
**Professional Identity in Transition**

Billie Oliver

February 2007

Professional Doctorate in Education (EdD)

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**UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX****BILLIE OLIVER****PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE IN EDUCATION (EdD)****CONNECTED IDENTITIES: PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY IN TRANSITION****SUMMARY**

This thesis outlines the impact on professional identities of the shift towards 'joined-up working' and the blurring of role distinctions embodied in much current government policy. Set within a context of continuously developing policy concerning the delivery of services to children and young people, and in particular in relation to workforce reform and 'modernisation', this thesis adopts an emergent or Grounded Theory approach to uncovering the experiences of a sample of Connexions Personal Advisers (PA) as they adapted to the change in and challenge to their professional identities. The introduction of the Connexions Personal Adviser was one of the first attempts to create a new 'modern, flexible, holistic' role, but as is explained in this thesis, it is unlikely to be the last. The experience of these PAs, therefore, represents an important contribution to our understanding of how professional identity can be understood during times of change.

Grounded Theory is an inductive approach within which theories are 'grounded' and built up systematically from emergent data. This thesis offers an analysis of the experience of a sample of Connexions PAs gathered through a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. An emergent theme has been the significance of inclusive and adaptive practitioner networks within which to explore the challenges to professional values brought about by the introduction of new roles. In this analysis 'identity' is not seen as a fixed construct needing to be 'changed', but as one that is continuously moulded and shaped as discourses about practice develop.

The thesis presents a dynamic and iterative conceptualisation of the 'Connected Identity' – conceived as an ongoing dialogue that, if managed and supported appropriately, can lead to the development of an invigorated and transformative practice that leaves the practitioners involved feeling energised and enthusiastic for their work.



## Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge and thank the many Connexions Personal Advisers with whom I have travelled on this journey of exploration since 2001. In particular, I am grateful to those who so generously participated in the field work for this thesis and for their continuing support and interest in my work.

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Finally, I wish to express my indebtedness to my family Iain, Beth, Wendy and Jayne to whom I have often been remote and pre-occupied and who have never stopped supporting and encouraging me in both practical and emotional ways.

*Powaqqatsi*

(Hopi for 'Life in Transformation')

### **Author's Declaration**

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been, and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Billie Oliver', with a small dot at the end of the line.

**Billie Oliver**

**1<sup>st</sup> February 2007**

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## Representing the profile of participant responses

In representing the 'voices' of my research participants I have sought to preserve their anonymity and confidentiality, while still permitting a sense of 'who' was speaking. Respondents have been coded and anonymised, and everyone involved was assured that any responses on the questionnaire or in an interview would be confidential, with neither participant nor their employer/organisation being identified in the analysis.

As a consequence, each direct quote that I have included in the remaining chapters is coded to identify the gender (*m/f*), professional/occupational background prior to Connexions (*sw = social work; yw = youth work; ca = careers adviser; ewo = education welfare officer; ed = teacher*), number of years in that previous role and whether the quoted extract is taken from a questionnaire (*q*) or an interview (*i*).

So, for example (*PA37: f-sw 10+ i*) is a female interviewee who previously worked in a role as a social worker for more than 10 years.

*'Shipwreck may be precipitated by events such as the collapse of a career venture, the defeat of a cause, betrayal by a community, or the discovery that an intellectual construct is inadequate. The shipwreck dissolves the meanings that once served us well. But in time the ship will travel to a new shore and there will be gladness. Through the shipwreck we come to transform, to discover, move beyond the loss, find new and more robust ways of knowing, understanding, being. The survival of the shipwreck tells us we can survive. We are amazed and strengthened.'*

*(Parks 1986:24)*

## **1. Prologue: Post card from a Traveller**

This thesis represents a stepping off point from two inter-connected journeys in which I have been involved since 2001. In the spring of 2001 I was part of a team that made a successful bid to be one of the first training providers in the country to deliver, under contract to the government, an innovative training programme for a newly-created professional role. The government had announced the ambitious Connexions Service and Strategy, and with it the new role of Connexions Personal Adviser, in 2000 (DfEE, 2000b). Connexions was described as a new support service for young people, designed to provide holistic support and to prevent vulnerable young people in particular from 'falling through the net' of the various services involved with them. Key to the Connexions strategy was the creation of the new role of Connexions Personal Adviser (PA), designed to be a single point of contact for young people, brokering a range of services to meet individual needs.

From 2001 onwards, practitioners from a range of professional backgrounds were recruited as PAs with the expectation that their previous role would develop to provide more holistic support to young people. A national training programme was designed as a means of 'conversion training' (CfBT, 2005). This Higher Education training programme was designed to bring together professionals from the range of professional backgrounds and agencies that formed Connexions services to develop a common understanding of the Connexions strategy, to build links and develop the Personal Adviser role. Nationally, between April 2001 and March 2005, 17,000 participants had undergone this training to become PAs, and 520 of these were enrolled to undergo the training as part of the contract that I was managing in the South West of England.

In the autumn of 2001, at the same time that I began my involvement in delivering the Connexions training programme, I also commenced work towards my Professional Doctorate in Education. This programme of study is designed to enable professionals to study problems that are of direct relevance to their own professional interests and organisational settings and it is expected that the thesis will contribute to professional knowledge and practice. My experience and analysis of the 'Connexions journey'.



therefore, became the central focus of my developing thesis in an ongoing action inquiry. The structure of the EdD lent itself very well to this action inquiry approach and to the emergent methodology that I have used for the research phase. Throughout the programme I have been building layers of insight and understanding into the context of my work and in turn using that insight to inform the assessed stages of the EdD programme. This final research phase, therefore, although it represents a culmination of sorts, cannot be separated from the body of previous work completed, and separately assessed, since 2001.

In 2003, at the end of 'phase 2' of the EdD programme I completed a 'Critical Analytical Study of an Area of Professional Practice' entitled 'Who Am I? Changing Professional Identities'. Set against the context of my own professional practice, as a youth and community work educator, that paper set out to develop an analysis of the theoretical frameworks and empirical issues relating to organisational change, and in particular in relation to change in the public sector in the context of the government's 'modernisation agenda'. A particular theme to emerge from that study was the need to find ways to enable the workforce to feel empowered rather than threatened by change. My review of the literature concluded that this could more likely be achieved by involving staff in a collective and reflective learning process throughout the period of change. In that study I also reported an identity crisis operating within Connexions, based on feedback evidence from participants I was working with on the training programme. I noted that a consistent theme to emerge from participants had been one of confusion surrounding questions such as, 'Who and what is Connexions?' and, 'Who and what is a Personal Adviser?'

The Critical Analytical Study, therefore, led to the proposal to explore, with Connexions Personal Advisers, their perceptions and experience of professional identity from within their new professional role. I was interested to find out whether and how practitioners constructed new professional identities and whether and how they managed the threats to their 'old' professional identities, brought about through the creation of a new, blended role that had no established community of practice. With the continuing policy drive towards 'joined-up' working and the creation of new, blended roles in health, education and social care, my aim was to develop an understanding of the ways such change impacts on the professional identities adopted by those involved.

Hall (1992:274) has suggested that a 'crisis of identity' is operating within 'modern societies' due to the 'constant, rapid and permanent change' that is dislocating the



central structures and processes of the social world. In essence, his argument is that the old identities which stabilised the social world for so long are in decline, giving rise to new and fragmented ones. Hall (1992:275) discusses three different concepts of 'identity' debated within social theory. The 'Enlightenment Subject' was the traditional model for considering issues of identity and was based on an essentialist view of the individual having an 'inner core' that gradually unfolded throughout their life but which remained essentially the same. The emergence of the notion of the 'Sociological Subject' reflected the growing complexity of the modern world and the awareness that the 'inner core' was not 'autonomous and self sufficient, but was formed in relation to significant others'. The subject still has an 'inner core' or essence that is 'the real me' but this is formed and modified in a continuous dialogue with the cultural worlds 'outside'. Identity, in this conception, bridges the gap between the personal and the public worlds and 'stitches the subject into the structure'.

'The fact that we project ourselves into these cultural identities, at the same time internalising their meanings and values, making them part of us, helps to align out subjective feelings with the objective places we occupy' (Hall, 1992:276).

It is these subjective meanings that are now said to be shifting in the 'Post-modern' conceptualisation of identity. According to Hall, the subject is becoming fragmented, composed not of a single but of several sometimes contradictory or unresolved identities. Correspondingly, the identities which composed our social landscapes are breaking up as a result of structural and institutional change. Epstein (1978:101) argued that professional identity represented 'the process' by which a person seeks to 'integrate their various statuses and roles, as well as their diverse experiences, into a coherent image of self'. In the post-modern conceptualisation it is this very process of identification that has 'become more open-ended, variable and problematic' (Hall:1992:276).

It is within the framework of this notion of fragmentation, uncertainty and constant change that the aims of this thesis are set. As I will discuss in chapter 2, recent government policy aimed at 'modernising' public services has led to the creation of a range of multidisciplinary roles and agencies. The advent of what the government often describes as 'joined up' services means that inter-professional activity is required to meet multiple objectives and professionals are expected to work together and share their expertise and skills. At one level this can have positive outcomes in that new ways



of working may be developed. At the same time, however, some may feel that the 'unique' skills they possess are effectively downgraded or lost through such relationships (Tucker, 2005). It has been noted by others that such approaches carry the 'risk of dilution of professional skills and knowledge as negotiation of professional identities takes place within a system that has no established communities of practice' (Artaraz, 2005:5). It is the nature of this 'process of negotiation' of professional identity that is the subject of this thesis. Nixon (2003:12) follows Hall (1992) in suggesting that the changing context of practice has led to 'a runaway world' within which identity 'is never given; nor can it ever be achieved once and for all. It is always in the making'. The central aim of this thesis is to explore the processes by which this continuous re-negotiation takes place.

The context for the exploration of this 'process of negotiation' is the role of Connexions Personal Adviser since this was one of the first examples of such blended professional roles. As I have indicated above, I also had experience of working alongside some of the first Personal Advisers, which afforded me access and insight into some of the confusions and contradictions that they experienced. It is important, however, to be clear that this thesis is not 'about Connexions'. Connexions as a policy, strategy and service is a contested area and there are many excellent critiques of the thinking behind it and the way in which it was introduced and has developed. Although I will examine some of these in the following chapter, it is not my intention to contribute to them. My aim, within this thesis, is to contribute to critiques concerning the stability and validity of the notion of 'professional identity'. Others (for example Henkel, 2000; Sachs, 2003; Avis, 1999; Nixon, 2003; Stronach et al., 2002 ) have discussed the impact of New Right policies of 'managerialism', 'New Public Management', 'modernisation' and the increasing drive towards 'performativity', accountability and surveillance on a range of existing professional identities. My research focuses primarily on the current policy aimed at creating new, generic roles. While the experience of practitioners moving into these new roles is undoubtedly flavoured by the conflicts they encounter between their professional values and organisational interpretations of policy, my aim is to move beyond these critiques. My aim is not only to explore the impact on professional identities of moves to create new blended and 'joined-up' roles, but also to explore the process by which identities are stabilised in these uncertain contexts.



## **Definitions and meanings**

Freidson (1994:15) has observed that, 'We cannot develop theory if we are not certain what we are talking about', and so it is important to be clear what definitions one is working within. Hunter (2003) suggests that existing research concerning the roles and identity of professionals has tended to be carried out within the context of 'changing notions of professional power, efficiency, competence and accountability' (p.333), that is, in terms of what it is that makes 'a professional'. Freidson (1994:150), however, argues that 'whatever else a profession is, it represents a kind of work that people do for a living'. Tucker (2005) argues that 'occupational identities' are constructed out of much more than the skills, knowledge and status that individuals and groups possess. Identities, he suggests, are also the product of attitudes and values held by a particular occupational group. In a similar vein, Ibarra (1999) defines 'professional identity' as being concerned with the 'attributes, beliefs, values, motives and experiences' by which people define themselves in a professional role.

It is this construction of 'occupational identity' that is of interest to me and is the focus of this research, rather than the factors contributing to one's status as 'a professional'. What, for example, does calling oneself a 'youth worker' or a 'careers adviser' mean in identity terms? And what happens to that sense of self when someone creates and imposes upon one a new role and/or title? Ibarra (1999) has argued that, despite an apparent consensus in the literature 'that identity changes accompany work role changes, the processes by which (professional) identity evolves remains under explained'. It is hoped that this thesis will contribute to understandings surrounding that process.

The 'kind of work' (Freidson, 1994) or 'professional role' (Ibarra, 1999) under consideration in this research is that concerned with working, mostly informally, with young people aged between 13 and 19 years. A number of established role identities are included within this 'kind of work' and so in chapter 2 I have attempted, through an analysis of available literature, to determine some of the similarities and differences between them. The concept of 'youth' is a deeply contested one, often carrying with it 'a great deal of baggage' (Spence, 2005:46) accompanied with mainly negative assumptions about behaviour and character. Currently, the age related boundaries of 'youth' are considered to be expanding at both the lower and upper ends. These are some of the discourses driving much of the current 'youth policy' that is the context for this thesis. In chapter 2 and chapter 3 I will discuss these discourses in more depth



and consider their potential impact on the identities of those who work with young people.

### **A Co-Inquiry**

Securing a contract to deliver the Connexions training programme represented, for me, the beginning of an adventurous journey into unexplored territory with some of those Personal Advisers as my fellow travellers. As I have described elsewhere (Oliver, 2004), in the early years of this contract, training providers had very little flexibility over the delivery and interpretation of the prescribed training materials. Furthermore, Connexions was a very new strategy about which neither trainers nor participants had much knowledge or experience. Data from our early evaluations suggest that both trainers and participants felt 'thrown together' to work with something they did not necessarily understand, and of which they felt little ownership. Frustrating as this was, it did facilitate a situation where we, as trainers and facilitators, were as much engaged in an exploration of the new strategy as were the participants, and a situation that I have described as 'co-inquiry' was created.

Such a collaborative approach, working alongside the Connexions Personal Advisers as they explored their changing role, placed me in the privileged position of being an 'insider researcher' with relatively easy access to both participants and data. Such a position, however, also carries with it a number of potential disadvantages in that insider researchers can become unable to stand back and see the wider picture. This can lead not only to the validity of any findings being threatened "through unaware projection and through consensus collusion" (Reason & Rowan 1981:247), but also to the unconscious assumption of clarity, due to being overly close to the topic under investigation. My own experience of trying to construct this thesis into a coherent 'story' whilst being continuously engaged in my own reflections led me to identify with Etherington (2004:23) who has likened her experience of constructing a book on reflexive research with 'trying to dress an over-active baby in a babygro!'. Her admission that, 'as a person who likes some degree of order and clarity', trying to construct a coherent narrative of a reflexive process 'caused me more than a few problems' also had strong resonance for me.

The process of developing this analysis has not been a straightforward or linear one for me. The methodology that I have used throughout this inquiry has involved me in an iterative journey between data collection, reflection on literature and reflection on findings as the analysis has gradually developed out of the emergent themes. This



reflexive process has been further complicated in recent months as I have increasingly exposed my developing analysis to public criticism and peer review (Oliver & Percy-Smith, 2004; Oliver, 2005a; 2005b, 2006). Exciting and illuminating as this process has been, it has not made it easy to present a coherent 'story' of the research I have been engaged in with a beginning, middle and end – and at times I have even been unsure where 'the beginning' is.

I will explore some of these methodological tensions more fully in chapter 4, however for the sake of coherence I have chosen to follow a more traditional model for the structure of this thesis. In the following two chapters I will explore, through an examination of the literature, some of the theoretical concepts upon which I have built my analysis. It is acknowledged that Connexions, as a strategy, is a contested area. However, this thesis does not set out to construct an evaluation of policy. The aim of this thesis is to examine the impact of that policy on the identities and roles of the practitioners involved with a view to understanding how we construct, maintain and negotiate our occupational identities during times of transition. In setting out to achieve that, however, some contextual understanding of the policy and the tensions it introduced is necessary. Chapter 2, therefore, begins by describing the policy context within which Connexions and other recent public sector changes have been set. This chapter also considers some of the literature examining the complexities and tensions surrounding the notion of 'modernisation' and its impact on professional roles and identities. In chapter 3, I will outline some of the relevant literature and theoretical approaches to understanding 'identity' especially from a perspective of identity in transition. I will do that within a framework that considers 'identity' as an issue for both young people and for 'professional' practitioners since such a framework has significance for my final analysis.

As I have explained, the methodological approach that I have chosen for this inquiry has involved me in an iterative journey between data collection, engagement with literature and reflection on findings, and so in chapter 4 I will describe and evaluate this approach, exploring in more depth some of the tensions surrounding espousal of participatory and reflexive ideologies. Chapter 4 also includes an overview of research participants and the methods of data collection before I proceed in chapter 5 to outline the main themes emerging from this inquiry. Finally, in chapter 6 I will reflect on and summarise these themes in relation to the theoretical concepts explored through the literature and offer an analysis of my own conceptualisation of the 'connected identity'.



As I have explained, the professional doctorate programme of study is designed to enable professionals to study problems that are of direct relevance to their own professional interests and organisational settings and to develop a thesis that will contribute to professional knowledge and practice. My own contribution to knowledge through this thesis advances the literature on the role of 'Communities of Practice' (Wenger, 1998) in shaping professional identities. My thesis explores the significance of practitioner networks in supporting the resilience of professional values and in facilitating a dynamic and exploratory approach to practice wherein practitioners are able to examine and re-negotiate their identities. In this analysis, 'identity' is not seen as 'fixed' and therefore needing to be 'changed', but as constantly evolving as discourses surrounding practice develop.

In the final chapter I will give a more detailed overview of some of the policy developments that have taken place in this field since the data in this thesis were gathered. I have done this not only to contextualise the continuing landscape of change that these Connexions Personal Advisers are caught up in, but also to help to explain the relevance of my findings to a wider workforce. Although this research is based on the experiences of a sample of Connexions Personal Advisers, the thesis explains how ongoing government policy, aimed at integrating those working with children and young people, gives these findings a wider significance. The experience of these PAs therefore represents an important contribution to our understanding of how professional identities are negotiated during times of change.



## **2. Contextualising Change**

The participants in this research have often expressed feelings of confusion and uncertainty, of being unvalued and not consulted as they have tried to work with and through the radical change brought about by the introduction of Connexions. Caught up in the very direct personal experiences that this particular change had on them, it is perhaps not difficult to understand how they perceived their experience to be only about them and their profession. My aim in this chapter, however, is to give an overview of the wider context of change and to situate Connexions as just one example of the sort of radical change to public services that has been the mission of the current government since 1997.

As I will outline later in this chapter, a considerable amount of this change agenda has been, and continues to be, aimed at integrating and reforming children's and young people's services. While the data reported on later in this thesis are taken from a sample of Connexions Personal Advisers coming to terms with the introduction of a new role, that experience is analysed within a framework of continuing change and reform. The Children's Workforce Reform Strategy (DfES, 2005a) commits government to 'stimulating new ways of working and the development of new roles' and claims that over time the children and young people's workforce 'could change considerably'. It is not unreasonable, therefore, to anticipate that other professional groups will undergo a similar process of identity exploration as these Connexions PAs. Before going on to examine their particular experience, however, I will firstly give an overview of some of the relevant themes underpinning what has become known as 'modernisation'.

### **Modernisation**

In recent years, what has become known as 'the modernisation agenda' has affected the organisation and delivery of public services in health, education, and social services in quite radical ways. In 1997, after eighteen years of being in opposition, the Labour Party regained office with an espoused commitment to 'modernisation' and a determination not to be seen as being associated with 'old' Labour socialism (Miller, 2004). Both the Labour Party and the nation were diagnosed as being in need of 'modernisation', as 'the force of change outside the country is driving the need for



change within it' (Blair, 1996:23). However, many commentators have noted similarities and continuities between this agenda and the 'managerialist' policies of its 'New Right' Conservative predecessor (Miller, 2004; Levitas, 2005; Lister, 2001).

'Managerialism' referred to the transfer of market sector concepts and practices into the public sector and to a decisive shift from an administrative orientation to a managerial consciousness and profit oriented culture (Dixon et al., 1998). As Clarke and Newman (1997) have argued, in contrast to the rule-bound, inward looking, ossified and compliant centred bureaucracy, management was portrayed as dynamic, innovative, performance centred and externally oriented. The private sector focus on customer satisfaction, with an emphasis on results, transparency and market product testing was contrasted with the tendency for professionalism to be paternalistic, opaque, inflexible on standards and insistent on self-regulation. Many commentators have pointed out how this 'more restricted vision' (Miller 2004:93), focusing on the implementation and management of policy, often clashed with the more discursive cultures traditionally found within the public sector professions. The impact on professional identities brought about by this shift towards a more managerialist and accountable culture has been noted by a number of commentators and I will consider some of these in chapter 3.

The modernisation agenda of New Labour has retained many aspects of managerialism including the perceived attack on the public sector professions. Some commentators (Miller, 2004) have referred to this as the continuation of a 'blame' culture and of insinuations of professional 'failure'. New Labour, it is suggested, claimed to have learnt the lessons from the 'failure' of previous, more modest approaches to change and to be unwilling to tolerate the threat posed by, for example, professional or organisational rivalry, jealousy, protectionism and narrow self-interest (Miller, 2004:47). As a consequence, government has often taken a centralist role in pursuing its desire to force change and has displayed a low level of trust in those professionals on whom its policies depend. In particular it has found it legitimate to confront those within the public services who resist or undermine the modernisation agenda:

**'We expect high standards of professional engagement. We seek a new flexibility in the professions that break down old working practices'**  
(Blair, 2002:27)



### **Joined-up and inclusive**

In 1999, the White Paper 'Modernising Government' (Cabinet Office, 1999) asserted that professional policy-making needed to change in order to respond to the 'increasingly complex, uncertain and unpredictable' world, and that to achieve this change it should be 'forward looking, outward looking, innovative and creative, questioning established ways and encouraging new ideas', it should 'use evidence from a wide range of sources', be 'inclusive', 'joined up' and 'evaluative'. With New Labour, therefore, the emphasis has focused on the development of collaborative practices and partnership relationships with all 'stakeholders' (White, 2000) as well as on accountability and transparency.

Taylor (2004) has observed that 'traditional health and social care structures are fast disappearing'. Whereas in the past there has been a 'patchwork of multi-professional practice operating in a somewhat ad hoc fashion, often depending on individual champions', there is now an increasing government requirement for services to be inter-professional. The continuing presence of complex and seemingly insuperable social problems has led increasingly to an acknowledgement that no agency or profession can be expected to address these issues single-handedly. Organisational and professional 'partiality and territoriality', together with organisational, philosophical and cultural differences, are increasingly seen as having 'contributed to policy failure' (Miller, 2004:132).

Such concerns have generated a number of calls for the development of a culture of collaboration and partnership between and within organisations and professions. The potential of a co-ordinated, collaborative and holistic approach to tackling complex issues has been evident in all government policy since 1997 when the newly created Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) noted that existing services were 'separated, independent and often did not exercise the possibility of maintaining open lines of communication among professionals' (Artaraz, 2005). The purpose behind this strand of policy has been to encourage inter-professional collaboration, and to identify and disseminate 'best practice'. However, a number of obstacles have been experienced in trying to make joint working across professional boundaries a reality. Miller (2004:152) argues that these calls for collaboration have come 'at the same time as specific professions feel threatened by a loss of identity and autonomy and are struggling to maintain a professional role'. Inter-professionalism, he suggests, has often been perceived as an attempt to 'de-professionalise or undermine professional legitimacy'.



Increasingly, also, there has been a growing policy focus on encouraging – or requiring – agencies and professionals to build partnerships with service users and 'stakeholders' and to involve service users in service planning, delivery and review. Such partnerships are expected to produce a deeper understanding of the problem and its context and consequently more creative and mutually owned responses. 'They are a means to generate information sharing, improve communication, enable a better understanding, avoid duplication, reduce inefficiencies and identify opportunities for the effective sharing of resources' (Miller, 2004:142). More significantly, partnership working implies an openness in decision making, responsibility and accountability.

However, despite the government's espousal of the principles and values of user involvement and flexible integration of services, this area of policy continues to be a contested territory. In particular, debate centres around the perceived gaps between rhetoric and reality (Braye, 2000). As Braye points out, the concept and definition of terms such as 'participation' and 'involvement' are notoriously difficult to unpick and one of the main difficulties with any such exploration is that the language is complex and that 'the same term means different things to different people' (p.18). Too often the words are used with an assumption that there is agreement over their meaning, whereas, when examined more closely, one begins to uncover a confusion that suggests more support for the rhetorical principles than for examining the reality of how to make it work in practice.

Braye (2000) has suggested that much of the government led policy aimed at increasing service user involvement has adopted a 'consumerist' approach that is about 'influencing individual consumption of service' and in which individuals can influence 'both price and quality through their purchasing power'. Such an approach, she argues, is usually restricted to the micro-level of user influence on the activities of front-line workers, with little effect on policy making or agency decision making at senior management level. Braye contrasts this approach with the 'democratic' model (Beresford and Croft, 1993), which seeks to challenge professional dominance and has as its purpose, 'achieving greater influence and control' for participants. However, as Braye (2000:19) suggests, the 'consumerist model often has a stronger presence – it is more tangible and may appear easier to achieve – thus giving the illusion of participation without the substance'.



## **Citizenship**

The discourses surrounding models of service user involvement also highlight the political relationship between service users and citizenship which are under-pinning themes in New Labour's agenda. Again, New Labour's interest in citizenship reflects the direction taken by the previous Conservative government. However, they have, in addition, drawn inspiration from a number of theoretical positions such as Beck (1992), Giddens (1994), Putnam (1995) and Etzioni (1995) in claiming to represent a form of politics that rejects competitive individualism in favour of embracing the concept of 'responsibility' and commitment to a 'stakeholder society' built on opportunity, responsibility and trust. New Labour's vision is of a society in which 'active' and 'responsible' citizens are fully engaged in the labour market, in their communities and in the democratic processes. The concepts of 'civil society' and 'community cohesion' run as strong themes through many of New Labour's policies. At the heart of this approach is a concern with restoring the balance between social rights and responsibilities.

However, although New Labour's vision is of 'an inclusive society', it is explicit about the expectations of membership and willing to impose regulatory measures in respect of those who are unwilling to meet these expectations. Preventative, educative, corrective or positive action measures have been introduced to address what is deemed to be 'undesirable' behaviour, while punitive measures predominate in relation to what is deemed to be 'wrong' (Miller, 2004:42). Such an approach has led many commentators to argue that 'social inclusion' has more in common with 'social integration' and 'social engineering' than with inclusion or economic and social equality (Levitas, 2005; Lister, 1998).

Levitas (2005) offers a model of three different discourses for thinking about the nature of social exclusion and strategies for dealing with it:

- A redistributive discourse (RED)
- A social integrationist discourse (SID)
- A moral underclass discourse (MUD).

In RED, the assumption is that the resources available in cash or kind to the poor need to be increased 'both relatively and absolutely'. In SID, the solution is seen to be in increasing labour market participation, for paid work is claimed to deliver inclusion both directly and indirectly through the income it provides. In MUD, particular groups are



seen to be a 'problem' for social order and the emphasis is, therefore, on changing behaviour through a mixture of sticks and carrots. Levitas has argued that a 'historical shift' in the meaning of social exclusion took place during the construction of New Labour prior to 1997 involving a major change from a RED to a mix of SID and MUD discourses. Since 1997, she argues, evidence can be found of the co-existence of and the contradictions and shifts between these different positions in much government policy.

Commentators such as Levitas (2005) have argued that the Blair government's approach marks a decisive break with a core social democratic principle of using state welfare as a means of creating a more equal society. The goal of equality of outcome has been replaced by equality of opportunity, and 'social exclusion' has become equated primarily with non-participation in the labour market. The key role for government, under New Labour, is seen as enabling and encouraging individuals to secure the necessary credentials to achieve a financially rewarding place in the economy. Critics of this approach, such as Levitas (2005), point out that the over emphasis on participation in paid work, ignores the social and community benefits of participation in 'unpaid' work, voluntary activity and association, as well as ignoring the fact that for many the experience of 'paid work' can be very negative.

These policy imperatives of 'increasing social inclusion' and of striving to create 'joined-up, modern services', breaking down the boundaries between professional groups, emphasising partnership, communication and information sharing, have become embedded in all key social policy areas since 1997. In particular, they have been observed to have led to a 'paradigmatic shift in the underlying principles' of service delivery for children, families and young people (Artaraz, 2005:1). Williamson (2005a:13) has argued that the 1990s witnessed a 'gradual, and often grudging, political acknowledgment' of the scale and challenge of young people's social exclusion, culminating in 1998 with a recognition by the New Labour government of the need for a 'clear focus on youth policy' and a 'more robust and integrated' policy response to socially excluded young people. The 'raft of measures' that, he argues, have been 'talked up (and sometimes put in place)' since 1997, is legion.

Williamson goes on to suggest that 'it is virtually impossible' to present the full catalogue of measures aimed at combating young people's social exclusion and that some measures 'actually dovetail with wider measures concerned with the promotion of active citizenship' (p.14). One of the themes running through this raft of measures,



however, has been that aimed at the labour market. Along with policies aimed at the youth justice system, this had a high priority for the new government which was concerned to 'allay populist concerns about idle youth and youth crime' (Williamson 2005a:14). It is within this discourse that Connexions was conceived and introduced. Aiming, it claimed, to stimulate a shift towards preventative strategies for young people at risk of social exclusion, the Connexions Service set out to offer a one-stop advice and guidance service for 13-19 year olds about any area of concern, including education, training and employment.

### **Connexions**

The Connexions Strategy was seen as a radical new policy initiative when it was introduced in England in April 2001 'to provide a wide range of support to meet the young person's needs and help them reach their full potential' (DfEE, 2000b). In the late 1990s a number of social policy reports (SEU 1998, SEU 1999a, SEU 1999b, SEU 2000) had begun to indicate there was a need for a more 'joined-up' approach to working with young people and it was suggested that while professionals and agencies continued to work in traditional uni-professional ways there was an increased likelihood that young people would 'slip through the net' of service provision and experience greater social and educational disadvantage. The core of the analysis was the belief that a key cause of the ineffectiveness of current provision was the proliferation of specialist agencies, each dealing with a disconnected part of the young person's life. This was reinforced by Merton's (1998:21) comment that, 'Young people often feel as if they are being passed from pillar to post and each time they meet an official from yet another agency they have to tell their story again'.

The notion was put forward (Bentley & Gurumurthy, 1999) that there was room for a new professional role - a 'youth broker' or personal adviser - who would maintain an overview of the whole of a young person's needs and provide some coherence across the different agency boundaries. In response to these reports the government announced its intention to set up a new support service for young people in *Learning To Succeed: a new framework for post 16 learning* (DfEE 1999), the aim being to ensure a 'smooth transition from compulsory schooling to post-16 learning' and to the world of work. The new service was phased in across the country over a two year period and, since April 2003, has been delivered throughout England by 47 local Connexions Partnerships - multi-agency bodies who were expected to have a Strategic Board and a Local Management Committee responsible for developing and implementing the strategy in their area. These local Connexions Partnerships were



made up of a range of partner agencies working with young people, including Local Education Authorities, Youth Services, Careers Services, Social Services, Health Bodies and Voluntary Sector Agencies.

At the time of writing, it remains unclear what the future of these Connexions Partnerships will be. In 2003, the Laming enquiry set up to investigate the death of Victoria Climbié, made a series of recommendations that led to the publication of the Green Paper 'Every Child Matters' (DfES, 2003a). Laming concluded that children's needs were being neglected or overlooked through a lack of 'joined-up' working, poor systems for information sharing and too great a reliance on professional and agency boundaries. Hence, the 'Every Child Matters' Green Paper was characterised by calls for the creation of new services and new working practices that emphasise the integration of services through multi-agency working and partnerships between the voluntary, community and statutory sectors including common assessments, information sharing and joint training. What has become known as the 'Every Child Matters agenda' appears to want to build on some of the earlier lessons learned from initiatives such as Connexions and Sure Start and proposes a radical overhauling of the organisational and professional structures affecting all those working with children and young people.

'Every Child Matters' (DfES, 2003a) also announced the setting up of new local authority based integrated services – the Children's Trusts, and the subsequent 'Youth Matters' Green paper (DfES, 2005d) indicated that it was likely Connexions PAs and Connexions one-stop-shops would become part of these Children's Trusts. 'Every Child Matters' also argued for the identification and allocation of what it called a 'lead professional', described as 'one practitioner who takes a lead role to ensure that front-line services are co-ordinated, coherent and achieving intended outcomes' (DfES, 2006a); the introduction of the new, pedagogic role of 'Early Years Professional' (DfES, 2005a); and the integration of professionals into multi-disciplinary services. This is a currently evolving area of policy and it is difficult to be sure how Connexions will develop within it. One of the key strategic aims however, continues to stress that those working with children and young people should be enabled to work across professional boundaries and to understand how their role fits in with the work of others. In the final chapter I will return to an overview of these policy developments, most of which have taken place since the data for this thesis were collected. For now, my purpose is to clarify the policy arena within which Connexions was conceived and established, since



it is relevant to making sense of the experiences of the Connexions PAs presented later.

### **The Connexions Personal Adviser**

At the heart of the new Connexions Service was what was described as 'a new professional role', the Personal Adviser (PA), who, it was envisaged, would have an 'overview' of the whole of a young person's needs, form a relationship of trust with them, provide a first point of intervention and then 'broker' the support of relevant specialist agencies (DfEE, 2000b). Personal Advisers were required to work within a framework known as APIR: Assessment, Planning, Implementation and Review (CSNU, 2001b), the aim of which is to work with the young person and other relevant people and agencies to reduce the barriers to social, educational and economic inclusion that they might be experiencing. The vision was for Personal Advisers to be located in 'the most appropriate setting'. For those 'looked after' in foster or residential care, for instance, this might be most appropriately through social workers working in leaving-care teams. Others might have Personal Advisers through Youth Offending Teams, while others may be allocated Personal Advisers in voluntary sector community-based organisations or through school, college or training providers. Many partnerships also work from 'one-stop-shops', voluntary sector youth projects and mobile offices and using 'outreach' workers in attempts to locate and work with those who in previous times might have missed out on having any connection with official agencies (Britton et al., 2002).

Interestingly, in the original consultation document on the role of the Personal Adviser (DfEE 2000a:18), there was reference to the creation of a 'national centre' or 'professional college' to enable PAs to begin to 'cohere as a profession'. By the time the new service was launched, however, the vision of an 'emergent new profession' had been considerably diluted, or seen as too ambitious, and the Personal Adviser became referred to as a 'new professional role'. Personal Advisers were, therefore, recruited from a range of existing relevant professions, such as Youth Work, Social Work and Careers Guidance and were inducted into the role of PA through 'mandatory' participation on a national training programme, the Diploma for Connexions Personal Advisers, the aims of which included:

'To enable people from a range of disciplines and employment settings, recently recruited as Connexions personal advisers, to gain a common set of knowledge and capabilities;

and

'To enable people from a range of disciplines and employment settings to begin to practise as Connexions Personal Advisers' (CSNU, 2001a)

The Connexions Diploma for Personal Advisers training programme was made up of five modules of supported distance learning with 'live training days' and 'action learning sets' (CSNU, 2001a) which were designed to encourage both individual and group reflection on, and participation and engagement with, the development of the Connexions strategy and of the Personal Adviser role. The Connexions Diploma was designed around eight key Connexions principles (Figure 1) and aimed to promote a multi-agency problem solving context, within which participants could explore ways to bring their existing skills and knowledge to working within the new inter-agency framework.

The Connexions training programme was delivered under contract to the DfES by 12 Higher Education Institutions between April 2001 and March 2005. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to comment in detail on the content, design or usefulness of the training programme, which has been done elsewhere (Oliver, 2002; Oliver, 2004, Coles et al., 2004; Holmes, 2004; CfBT, 2005). Nevertheless the creation and development of the Connexions Personal Adviser role forms the backdrop to this thesis and the training programme therefore represents an important part of the PAs' experience as reported in chapter 5.



**Figure 1: The Connexions Eight Key Principles:**

- Raising aspirations – setting high expectations of every individual
- Meeting individual need and overcoming barriers to learning
- Taking account of the views of young people – individually and collectively, as the new service is developed
- Inclusion – keeping young people in mainstream education and training and preventing them moving to the margins of their community
- Partnership – agencies collaborating to achieve more for young people, parents and communities than is achieved by agencies working in isolation
- Community involvement and neighbourhood renewal – through the involvement of community mentors and through Connexions personal advisers brokering access to local welfare, health, arts, sport and guidance networks
- Extending opportunity and equality of opportunity – raising participation and achievement levels for all young people, influencing the availability, suitability and quality of provision and raising awareness of opportunities
- Evidence based practice – ensuring that new interventions are based on rigorous research and evaluation into 'what works'

(DfEE, 2000b)

### **A Confused Strategy?**

This thesis does not set out to offer an evaluation or critique of Connexions as a strategy or policy. The purpose of the research undertaken with Connexions Personal Advisers was to explore the impact on one's sense of identity brought about by the move into a new inter-professional role. It is hoped that the findings will have a wider significance in other public sector arenas, where similar changes and creation of new roles are taking place. Nevertheless, some of the confusion and challenge to their sense of identity voiced by respondents in my study was directly related to confusions and contradictions in the way the policy was rolled out and managed. It is necessary, therefore to examine some of those wider contradictions before moving on to explore the experiences of this particular sample of practitioners. It is also important to distinguish between the Connexions strategy and the Connexions service. As Hughes (2005:5) has observed, 'the *strategy* was only implemented in part and assumptions on available resources could not be fulfilled. It was within this complex and confused strategic context that the *service* responded and sought to deliver government set targets and policy requirements'.

Although Connexions was announced as a new 'support service' for all young people aged 13-19 (DfEE, 2000b), it was expected that the majority of young people would not need to access a Personal Adviser, except for occasional advice and guidance. From the outset however, there has been a policy imperative to reduce the numbers of young people deemed to be 'disengaged' (SEU, 1999b) from learning or employment. More recently, this group of young people (calculated to comprise some 9% of all young people in this age group), have come to be referred to as NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) and it was estimated that they would need more intensive and sustained support from a Personal Adviser. For these young people, therefore, it was envisaged that a more holistic and longer term approach was needed and that the linchpin of this process would be the Connexions Personal Adviser whose role would be to 'build trust and engage the young person in a participative approach to change'.

In the foreword to the document announcing Connexions, the Prime Minister, Tony Blair wrote,

'The best defence against social exclusion is having a job, and the best way to get a job is to have a good education, with the right training and experience'  
(DfEE, 1999)



Many commentators have concluded, therefore, that the roots of the Connexions Strategy are firmly placed within what Levitas (2005) has described as a 'social integrationist discourse' (see page 13 above), which focuses on participation in paid work being the key to social inclusion and to other social and economic goals including the reduction of crime and of welfare costs. This is because, although Connexions claims to be a service for all young people (a universal service), it is designed to give priority to those 'most at risk of underachievement and disaffection' (a targeted service). Levitas (2005:197), however, suggests that the ambiguity within the Connexions strategy is more complex than this. On the one hand, she suggests, the deployment of Personal Advisers can be seen within the 'Redistributionist' discourse (RED) since they offer a 'positive development' in making services and information more widely accessible. However, if the 'causal model behind the adviser system is one of intensive intervention at individual level to change behaviour and attitudes' (p.198) then the strategy can be seen as being much closer to the 'Moral Underclass' discourse (MUD). This paradoxical association, between the positive and more problematic interpretations of the Connexions strategy, is key to understanding the confusions and tensions in role experienced by many Connexions PAs.

Moore (2005:25) argues that New Labour has 'always been ambivalent in its policies towards young people' and that this ambivalence can be observed in the 'significant shifts in policy' since 1997. He suggests that the Crime and Disorder Act (1998) represented young people as 'potential offenders' and signalled the new government's 'tough' approach to 'problematic youth' (MUD). Then in 1999, the 'Bridging The Gap' report (SEU, 1999b) placed offending and anti-social behaviour within a wider context of poor school attendance, poor school performance and the consequent failure of young people to obtain appropriate skills to enter the workforce (SID). The resulting introduction of the Connexions Service and the Connexions Personal Adviser, he argues, brought about a shift from seeing young people as potential offenders to seeing young people as socially excluded (and therefore potentially at risk of offending).

Moore describes the 'difficult, almost contradictory task' of Connexions, - designated as an agency for all young people but borne out of a concern for the smaller proportion of socially excluded youth. Watts (2001) has also observed this contradiction and the ambiguous nature of the Connexions strategy, suggesting there might be a 'crucial design flaw' in the claim that Connexions is designed for all young people. Watts has



argued that 'universality was, in fact, a second-order consideration' and that, as a consequence, efforts had to be made to extrapolate to all young people measures which had been designed to address the needs of the primary (socially excluded) target group (p.167).

Jeffs and Smith (2001) offered an extended critique of the Connexions strategy drawing on many of these same arguments. However, they went further in suggesting that Connexions could arguably be seen as less about generating a highly skilled workforce and rather more about the 'elimination or containing of destabilising influences' (p.7) and in particular to an 'extension of the surveillance of young people' (p.8).

'The practical effect of this for those individuals who are deemed to need 'in-depth' guidance or 'intensive sustained support', is that they will be subjected to increased monitoring and intervention.'  
(Jeffs and Smith, 2001:9)

The extension of monitoring young people's progress is also linked to what is deemed to be another problematic and contradictory design flaw with Connexions – the imposition of targets by which to direct and judge the performance of the agencies involved. Hoggarth and Smith (2004:11) have exposed how 'the tyranny' of monitoring these government imposed targets has led to the phenomenon they call 'impact leakage' within Connexions, whereby the potential impact of the strategy is lost. One of the contributors to 'impact leakage', in their analysis, is 'too rigid a focus on the NEET target and pressure on young people to take up sometimes unsuitable EET options' (p.8). It has also been suggested that the target-led culture has given rise to inequalities in resource allocation, with resources 'being taken away from the vast bulk of young people who do not pose a threat to order' (Jeffs and Smith, 2001:2). Formulating targets as EET destinations diverts attention and resources away from other outcomes, particularly soft outcomes concerned with personal development and underlying needs, which young people may need first in order to be able to achieve the harder outcomes (Hoggarth and Smith, 2004:205).

Design contradictions such as these had an impact on the identities of those who entered Connexions to work as Personal Advisers, most of whom had not entered the field of 'youth working' (Tucker, 2004) with a view of young people as 'problematic'. Holmes (2004:35) has suggested that the inevitable compromises that had to be made



led to a lack of clarity about the role of PA and of Connexions and that this contributed to a 'rapid loss of morale and increasing frustration' with the role. However, there were some, potentially greater, threats to existing professional identities caused by the way in which Connexions as a Service was introduced. The introduction of Connexions brought about a flurry of position papers from within the fields of youth work, social work, education welfare and careers guidance, as each profession was forced to re-examine their own professional distinctiveness and to explore how working in partnership with Connexions could add value to what they already provided (Garrett, 2002; Ainley et al., 2002; Smith, 2000; Szymczyk, 2003). However, it was arguably the identities of those working within the youth services and the careers service that were most threatened and so it is to a closer examination of those roles that I will now turn.

### **The Challenge to Existing Professional Roles**

When the 'Bridging The Gap' report (SEU, 1999b) was published there were fears amongst youth workers that the youth service would be subsumed into a wider and more dominant partner, the Connexions Service, which would take over many of the roles of the youth service. Youth work, at that time, was seen as having a lower priority within government than the more intervention-based and target-oriented Connexions approach (Moore, 2005). Having been more closely associated with Youth Work, I was initially more familiar with these concerns. However, the 'lock, stock and barrel' (Holmes, 2004) transfer of Careers Advice for 13-19 year olds into Connexions also meant a loss of professional identity for many Careers Advisers, particularly those who had been working in that field for a number of years.

Watts (2001) has suggested that a major flaw to the success of Connexions was that the original intention of merging youth, careers and educational welfare services was only ever partly implemented and that the only service brought into Connexions as a whole was the Careers Service. Watts has argued that the main reason for this was 'administrative convenience' since the Careers Service was the only budget that the DfEE was able to control. The decision to commit the whole of the Careers Service budget to the Connexions Service alongside failure to secure similar commitments from other budget holders 'produced an imbalance in the structure of Connexions' from the outset. Watts goes on to argue that this development also meant that existing, mainstream careers service work was placed under threat. The 'refocusing' agenda had, since 1997, begun to make access to careers interviews more difficult for young people in school, but under Connexions, although the statutory duty to provide careers advice remained, the Careers Service as a visible agency disappeared.



In practice, the existing Careers Service was re-branded as Connexions in many partnership areas, and these new companies became the lead agencies in the local Connexions Partnerships with responsibility for forging partnership contracts with other agencies and the voluntary sector. Thus, the Careers Service network formed the backbone of the scheme and the majority of the new Connexions Personal Advisers came from the 're-branded' Careers Services. This not only led to many people holding the perception that 'Connexions' was 'about careers', but also imposed an enforced – and in many cases unwelcome – change of both title and role on the careers advisers.

Ten years earlier, Bates (1990:67) had noted that Careers Guidance possessed 'a chameleon-like ability to change in hue according to the prevailing socio-economic climate and political forces'. Given the multitude of changes to the organisation and structure of careers guidance delivery in recent years, it is now even more difficult to establish an absolute definition of the careers guidance professional identity or role. Nevertheless, according to the Institute of Careers Guidance (2006), careers guidance is broadly about 'helping people to realise their full potential'. Careers guidance practitioners traditionally help people to make their own educational, training and occupational decisions 'according to what is most suitable for their life and circumstances'. The activities may take place on an individual or group basis and may be face to face or at a distance. They include career information provision, counselling interviews, career education programmes, taster programmes and transition services. While the 'actual work' of careers guidance practitioners may vary depending on their specific role, all practitioners need to be able to 'build a rapport with clients, liaise effectively with other staff, be credible with employers, be flexible and be able to adapt readily to change'.

Commentators tend to agree that prior to Connexions, the careers service was used to delivering an 'almost universal, school-based, provision'. Under Connexions, however, the new role re-focused to include looking after young people in a more holistic way and this was seen to pose a threat to the 'quality of advice and guidance given to those of average and high ability' (Cisse, 2001). Watts (2001) offers an important overview of policy shifts, since the introduction of New Labour, which have impacted on the development, focus and identity of careers guidance work. This can be set alongside similar reviews of changes of focus in youth work (Smith, 2003b; Moore, 2005) caused by what Mark Smith has suggested are policy initiatives concentrated on



'bureaucratisation in the shape of joined-up thinking and the surveillance and control of individuals' (Smith, 2003b:50).

### **Careers Guidance**

Watts (2001) describes how government policy in relation to the Careers Service, prior to the introduction of Connexions, had become progressively focussed on those who had already dropped out of the education, training and employment system, or were at risk of doing so. Watts advises that it is important to note the extent of the policy shift denoted by these measures. Under the previous Conservative Government, the Careers Service had been 'marketised' by contracting it out on a competitive tendering basis, but it had been clearly defined as 'a universal one', addressing the needs of all young people. The 'focusing' agenda introduced by the government from 1997 meant that careers services ceased to carry out careers interviews with all young people in schools. Watts suggests that in practice this became more of a 'targeting' agenda (p.166) and that young people 'who were performing well but were uncertain about what they wanted to do found it difficult or impossible to secure a careers interview' (p.166). Watts suggests that these changes posed 'major challenges' for the future of career guidance provision for young people with the notion of career guidance as an entitlement for all young people being 'subordinated to the government's social exclusion agenda' (p.158).

In its UK country note, the OECD Review of Career Guidance Policies (2003:5) observed that the introduction of Connexions with its emphasis on serving the needs of those 'most at risk' had not been 'without controversy'. Careers guidance professionals, they observed, had expressed concern about the balance between the universal and targeted provision 'and also about the weakening of the careers guidance "brand name"'. These concerns had been fuelled by the perception of some careers and Connexions staff that specialist careers qualifications were not being encouraged under the new arrangements, and that there had been insufficient appreciation of the specialised knowledge base and competences required to provide careers guidance. On the other hand, however, Hoggarth and Smith (2004:13) found that there was 'overwhelming evidence' that most young people formed their impressions (chiefly from presentations in school) of Connexions as being primarily concerned with options and careers. The 'identifier' of careers advice and guidance, they argued, appeared to be conveyed so strongly that it masked the messages about the wider role of the PA.



In his early analysis of Connexions, in 2001, Watts foresaw, fairly accurately, a number of problems in relation to the 'traditional' role of careers adviser. Firstly, he suggested that careers guidance services had, traditionally, 'paid little if any attention to the informal economies' (Watts, 2001:163). This meant that if careers advisers were going to be able to form meaningful relationships with young people who had dropped out of the formal system or were at risk of doing so, they would need to understand – and be prepared to work to some extent within – the subjective frame of reference of these young people (p.163). Many Connexions PAs, who came from a careers service background, suddenly found themselves working with young people with multiple personal, health and social needs and they felt under-qualified to deal with these. At the same time, they lost their role as specialist careers advisers, meaning that they could not be one of the specialist services to which PAs could broker access. As Watts suggests, it soon became clear that all PAs, even those who had not been trained to provide guidance, would have to deliver careers advice. This raised, for many ex-careers advisers, the danger of serious erosion of professional standards that was experienced as confusing and demeaning.

### **Youth Work**

In relation to the impact on youth work, Mark Smith (2000) has also described the Connexions Strategy as 'deeply problematic' and flawed, arguing that it entailed a 'considerable narrowing of focus' for many youth workers and informal educators in that it took a 'problem-oriented and individualising' approach. He also criticised it for its 'outcomes' and 'target driven' approach which, in his view, made it fundamentally concerned with moulding and directing behaviour, rather than with education. Smith (2000:1) argued that the blend of theory, knowledge and skills required in the role of PA are unique, drawing as it does on expertise from 'what we have traditionally known as youth work, careers work and welfare rights – with a dash of mentoring thrown in'. There is, he argues, a strong casework element, combined with the ability to practise in informal settings.

For youth workers this meant a shift from an educative role to one of advice and guidance. The target driven approach meant that, for youth workers, there was an orientation away from working with young people to explore how and where they may flourish and to develop their own strategies for growth. Smith (2000) perceived an apparent contradiction or tension between, on the one hand, a young person centred service able to command the trust of young people and understand their needs, and on the other, a service that would be required to carry out the control function of ensuring



school attendance and whose performance would be measured by prescribed outcomes related to participation in the formal education and training system.

Smith (2002) admits that when people talk about youth work 'they can mean very different things' and that it might be more helpful to think of there being different forms of youth work rather a single practice with commonly agreed characteristics. Over the years, he suggests, contrasting traditions of youth work have emerged and developed and in recent years, as we have seen, there has been a shift from 'open' provision towards the targeting of provision on working with groups of young people deemed to be 'at risk' in some way. Nevertheless, Smith suggests that it is possible to identify some key dimensions that have been present to differing degrees in the central discourses of youth work practice since the early 1900s.

Youth work, Smith suggests, involves focusing on young people, emphasising voluntary participation and relationship, committing to association, being friendly and informal and being concerned with the education and welfare of young people. Smith has argued that the emphases within Connexions on monitoring, case management and individualised ways of working run counter to these 'key characteristics of youth work' (Smith, 2002:10). He suggests that youth work does not have preconceived ideas concerning outcome, rather it is 'unpredictable' and may involve anyone. He criticises Connexions for its focus on 'the individual rather than on the development of association', for its focus on 'problem' young people rather than on young people as a whole and for its orientation towards 'casework rather than education'.

Kerry Young has also argued that the problem for youth work is that it has often failed to express clearly, coherently and consistently its nature and purpose. Definitions, she suggests, have been constructed not from the basis of purpose but rather from a desire to reflect and affirm existing provision and practice (Young, 1999:21). However, Young suggests that when we examine a range of these attempts to define youth work 'what becomes self-evident is not the difference in expression or language regarding the nature and purpose, but the coherence in meaning and intention' (p.23). This coherence is evident particularly in terms of enabling and supporting young peoples' capacity to take charge of themselves and their lives and participate in decision making processes in their community. Young starts from the position that the 'uniqueness' of youth work is to be found not in its methods, curriculum content or 'target groups' but in its purpose. Youth work she suggests is about 'exploring values' – a purpose that is completely different from seeking to inculcate particular values in young people (p.4)



Youth work, according to Young, is not an activity for inculcating 'rigid patterns of socially accepted behaviour', its intention is 'to liberate as opposed to domesticate' young people' (p.79). Youth work is about building relationships with young people that accept and value them and 'involves honesty, trust respect and reciprocity' (p.5).

Taylor (2000) however, has suggested that such analyses present an overly idealised view and that in reality 'the bulk of youth work as practised' represents a vastly different picture. In Taylor's experience, youth work has always been moulded by different political, managerial, financial and organisational discourses:

'There has never been a Golden Age of Youth Work, wherein creative, critical dialogue was the order of the day, where Process flowed free! Historically, only a tiny minority of workers has embraced an 'open and developmental' practice. Youth work in general has been scared rigid by such anarchy.' (Taylor, 2000:3)

Bradford (2005) agrees that youth work remains 'an ambiguous set of practices, pushed in different directions at different times by different interests' but argues that underlying all its different guises is a commitment to 'voluntary' and 'participatory' relationships with young people (Bradford, 2005:58). Importantly, he argues, it is precisely this voluntary aspect of the relationship that was so threatened by policy developments such as Connexions. In addition, with the increasing focus on work with young people considered to be 'at risk', many youth workers became concerned that they were being required to be 'agents of social control' rather than 'informal educators' seeking to engage collaboratively with young people 'on their own terms' (Bradford, 2005).

### **Personal Advisers**

What seems to emerge from these various analyses is that there is no single, identifiable practice with commonly agreed characteristics for either youth work or careers guidance, or for any of the other professional backgrounds entering Connexions for that matter. It would seem, from the various analyses presented above that both guidance workers and youth workers might lay claim to a holistic and empowering approach to practice with young people. Based on the work of Carl Rogers (1967), holistic approaches claim that a person's situation cannot normally be considered separately from other factors operating within their social context. Both professions would prefer to disassociate themselves from notions of 'problem youth'.



preferring to work with all young people. Both professions lay claim to the importance of forming friendly and trusting relationships with young people and helping them to achieve their full potential. All of these values were also embraced by the espoused principles of the Connexions strategy (DfEE, 2000b).

However, Hoggarth and Smith (2004), in their interviews with Connexions PAs, found that the advent of Connexions had indeed disturbed the professional identities and traditional boundaries of operation of those involved. PAs, they found, expressed widely different views about the nature of Connexions and its achievements and these were clearly influenced by their previous backgrounds and experiences. Some former careers advisers 'complained vigorously about their loss of professional identity and specialist knowledge' and the way in which, as they saw it, they were prevented from offering sound careers advice 'to those who want it' (Hoggarth and Smith, 2004:50). Some PAs whose background was in youth work, education welfare or social work also appeared negative, 'apparently resenting the intrusion of Connexions into their specialist areas or perceiving it as a waste of their skills or a loss of resources for their own service' (ibid.). Targets were also found to be 'a particularly hot issue' for youth workers and workers from the voluntary sector, where the notions of worker 'autonomy' and sector 'independence' have long been a part of the traditional mix of values. Some youth workers felt that the target driven approach prevented 'a flexible response to need'.

It should not, however, be assumed that all PAs entered their new role with negative expectations. Many, from all professional backgrounds, 'positively embraced' the enlargement of their role and 'welcomed' the chance to work more closely with other youth related agencies. As Hoggarth and Smith (2004:50) acknowledge, there were 'enthusiasts and doubters on each side'. My experience of working alongside Connexions PAs on the Diploma training programme led me to similar conclusions. Despite some reservations about the job title, for many PAs there were high hopes about the possibilities of their new role. Furthermore, there was considerable agreement that, not only were the Connexions principles appropriate, but they represented a welcome recognition of holistic and young person centred practice that many felt had been missing in previous policy.

It was my experience, and that of training providers in other universities with whom I networked, that many PAs came to the training programme recognising and welcoming the ambitious nature of the new Connexions Service, but seeking reassurance that



they would be both prepared and properly supported to undertake their demanding new role. It was as the gap between the espoused rhetoric of the principles and the practice as they experienced it within their partnerships began to emerge that disillusion and anger began to set in. PAs frequently reported feeling pulled between working in a person centred way, trying to build relationships and respond to young people's stated needs, and increasing pressure over a whole range of targets, in particular to reduce NEETs. These views are also reflected in the responses of PAs who participated in my research, as reported in chapter 5.

Tucker (2005) has argued that those entering the professional arenas of 'youth working' do so with a range of common pressures and issues shaping their day to day practices. Such pressures and issues, he suggests, are filtered through the policies that govern work with young people, the kind of services that are created for them and priorities and visions for different kinds of work.

'There will be incongruities between the defined identity of professionals as proposed by systems, and by individuals, and these will change according to contextual and individual factors and exigencies. Identity must be forever re-established and negotiated.' (Tucker, 2005:126)

Lawler (2002:255) also suggests that identity is not something which can be 'read off from an externally imposed schema'. People may well belong to designated groups – such as 'youth worker' or 'careers adviser' - but this in itself does not tell us about the kinds of individual identities that they build. Stronach et al. (2002) arrived at similar conclusions, rejecting the construct of 'a' professional identity such as 'a teacher' or 'a nurse' as being 'indefensibly unitary'. They reported finding that professionals frequently acknowledged a 'plurality of roles, uneasy allocations of priority, and uncertain attributions of identity' (p.118). Furthermore, their plural accounts were far from stable. Professionals, they suggested, do not conduct their practices in the 'real' so much as they 'traffic between the twin abstractions of the ideal and the unrealised' (p.132). The focus of this thesis is to reflect on the strategies PAs used as they jockeyed with these ideals and tried to understand and inhabit the reality of their new role.

One final point remains to be made before moving on to consider theoretical approaches to thinking about identity construction and negotiation. For the youth workers, social workers, education welfare officers, teachers and counsellors who took



up positions as Connexions PAs, there was always, theoretically, the option of returning to the service from which they had come if they found their professional values to be in too much conflict with practice in Connexions. For the careers advisers this was not the case. Their service, by and large, had become Connexions, and their 'professional' title, within the field of advice and guidance with young people, had disappeared. Understandably, this led to 'scars and resentments' (Hoggarth and Smith, 2004:51) amongst some staff and a 'path of professional resistance' by others. As Hoggarth and Smith (2004) point out, any large organisation would produce similar patterns of behaviour and response to re-organisation. What is significant for Connexions, they suggest, is that the scale of change meant that 'professional recalcitrance' was bound to be high at the stage of implementation, and this had an inevitable impact on the development of the service.

I will return to reflect on some of these themes when we consider the experiences of the Connexions Personal Advisers who participated in my research. Before going on to look at that research in more detail, however, I will first examine some theoretical approaches to considering issues of identity construction, maintenance and transition and the relevance of these ideas to explorations of professional identity.

### **3. Identity**

In chapter 2 I outlined recent government policy aimed at 'modernising' public services and creating a range of multidisciplinary roles and agencies. As I have discussed above, Connexions is but one example of this commitment to 'joined up' services, where inter-professional activity is required to meet multiple objectives and professionals are expected to work together and share their expertise and skills. Although one of the aims of this approach is to improve information sharing and encourage the development of new, more responsive ways of working, there is the risk that some professionals may feel that the 'unique' skills they possess are effectively downgraded or lost in the process (Tucker, 2005). As Artaraz (2005:5) has suggested, such approaches carry the 'risk of dilution of professional skills and knowledge as negotiation of professional identities takes place within a system that has no established communities of practice'.

It is the nature of this 'process of negotiation' of professional identity that is the subject of this thesis and in this chapter I will consider some of the literature I have drawn on to help me understand and make sense of this. However, reflecting on the way in which the Connexions PAs described their struggle to maintain a sense of identity, I was often struck by strong parallels between their experience and that of young people in transition. Given that the role of Connexions PA was introduced with the aim of helping young people in transition, I have found it interesting to reflect on these similarities and to build them into my developing analysis. Just as for young people, the uncertainty and confusion experienced by the PAs brought with it increased stress and vulnerability and led to difficulties in constructing a stable role identity. Before going on to consider the literature on professional identity and change, therefore, I will firstly explore some of the theoretical approaches to understanding the development of identity in young people.

#### **Identity and Transitions**

Much of the wider psychological literature on identity formation and exploration has centred around the study of adolescence. In identity theory, the core of an identity is said to be the 'categorisation of the self as an occupant of a role, and the incorporation,



into the self, of the meanings and expectations associated with that role and its performance' (Stets and Burke, 2000:225). Major theorists, such as Erikson (1968), tend to agree that the formation of a personal identity should be defined in terms of what is taken to be 'self' in contrast to what is considered to be 'other'. The process of 'othering' is seen as a way of defining and securing one's own positive identity through the stigmatization of an 'other'. The means by which one differentiates oneself from others is considered to be central to the experience of forming an identity (Geldard and Geldard, 2004).

Erikson (1968) suggested that during the process in which a sense of identity develops or transforms there will be an unconscious striving for continuity with a previous sense of self and that the process of change will entail a period of questioning and exploration before commitment to a revised identity is achieved. Erikson therefore envisioned a series of eight 'psychological tasks' that reflected the underlying struggles associated with identity exploration at specific life stages. Most of Erikson's work was focused on the study of adolescence and the 'psychological task' that he framed as 'identity formation versus identity confusion'. This has formed the basis for a lot of work on the nature of 'youth transitions'.

For the past 30 years or so, the dominant discourse for interpreting the experiences of young people has been what has become known as the 'transitions discourse'. It is widely accepted that young people's lives change rapidly and often dramatically between the ages of 13 and 25 as they move towards independence (Coleman et al., 2004). However, increasingly commentators refer to 'extended transitions' and 'precarious transitions' and the fact that a number of different transitions occur at different times during adolescence and these are all experienced differently depending on social background, ethnic origin, gender and on living circumstances.

'It is important to recognise that the overall transition from child to adult is accomplished through multiple smaller transitions all of which may potentially be stressful or difficult in themselves.'

(Coleman et al., 2004: 227)

In recent years, much has been written about the 'extended' nature of 'youth transitions' (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Miles, 2000; Coles, 2004; Bradley and Hickman, 2004; Thomson et al., 2004) and it is a widely held view that for young people the transition to adulthood or independence has become much more protracted.



unpredictable and increasingly 'fragmented' in that the different markers of adulthood are 'increasingly uncoupled from each other' (Thomson et al., 2004:xiv). Increasingly, discussions about 'youth transitions' are set within the context of a rapidly changing, uncertain and confusing post-industrial society which has meant that young people today have to negotiate 'a set of risks' which were largely unknown to their parents.

This increased uncertainty is widely acknowledged to be a source of stress and vulnerability (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997) and the extension of transitions and changes to the 'typical sequence of events' is seen as having implications for the construction and establishment of a stable identity (Côté and Allahaar, 1996). As such, the search for an individual identity, it is argued, has become elongated and more complex (Adams and Marshall, 1996). The 'transitions discourse' has many similarities with Hall's (1992:274) 'crisis of identity' as discussed in chapter 1. According to Hall, the 'post-modern subject' is conceived as having no fixed, essential or permanent identity. 'Identity' has become a 'moveable feast'. There is always something incomplete about it. It is always 'in process of being formed' (p.287).

### **Possible Selves**

Thomson et al. (2004) have suggested that one way of thinking about the changing conditions of young people's lives is to recognise that in becoming adult, young people are pursuing the experience and recognition of 'competence', or 'the feeling that you are good at doing or being something' (p. xv). Erikson (1968) maintained that this search for an identity was a continuing process, not solely restricted to adolescence. Identity, he suggested is never attained once and for all, but is constantly lost and regained through a process of questioning, exploration and commitment.

Markus and Nurius (1986) developed these ideas into their theory of 'possible selves'. They defined 'possible selves' as representations of individuals' ideas 'about what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming' (p.954). In this framework, 'possible selves' are seen as the essential link between self-concept and motivation. Reflecting on these ideas, Adams and Marshall (1996) suggested that the 'primary mechanisms that stimulate transformation in identity include self-awareness, self-focusing, and self-consciousness due to dialectic or incongruent thoughts, feelings or behaviours' (p.438) and that the 'dialectic processes of identity resolution' are a function of the individual's experiencing an incongruity between 'the self-as-known and the self that could be'. Gilligan (2000:38) also drew on the notion of 'possible selves' arguing that, for young people, developing



a sense of 'worthiness' and competence usually involves some comparison by the individual between how they would like to be and how they think they actually measure up.

Recent empirical research into the 'Possible Selves' construct has tended to suggest that possible selves emerge during 'affectively significant relationships' (Kerpelman and Pittman, 2001; Rossiter, 2003). In recent years, identity theorists have drawn on this notion of a 'meaningful relationship' and incorporated it into the concept of 'resources' (things that sustain people) in the process of identity formation and transition (Stets and Burke, 2000:225). This idea has also been applied to thinking about the nature of resilience. Resilience has been described as 'the ability to bounce back having endured adversity' (Gilligan, 2000:37); as 'the ability to thrive, mature, and increase competence in the face of adverse circumstances or obstacles' (Gordon-Rouse, 2001:461); and as 'the degree to which the system is capable of learning and adaptation' (Cumming et al., 2005:975). In recent years, there has been a growing interest in uncovering the factors that contribute to some people developing resilience and one of these is thought to include having a network or secure 'base-camp' which encourages exploration of possible selves (Gilligan, 2000). In relation to young people, it has been found that a sense of secure base is cultivated by a 'sense of belonging within supportive social networks and by attachment type relationships to reliable and responsive people' (Gilligan, 2000:39). Gilligan argues that strengthening social networks is an important factor in promoting a sense of belonging and a sense of mattering.

Adams and Marshall (1996) have pointed out the apparent 'paradoxical association' between these two 'seemingly opposing factors': the need for a sense of uniqueness or individuation and the need for 'communion' which focuses on the need for 'belongingness, connectedness, and union with others'. They have argued that identity construction is dependent on both a sense of uniqueness and a sense of belonging and that the dynamic inter-play between them is critical. Integration centres on the involvement, connection and communion with others and socialisation that facilitates integration will result in 'a sense of mattering in the form of a social or collective identity' (p.431). Too high a degree of differentiation, which results in 'extreme uniqueness' of an individual, can be met with a lack of acceptance by, and communion with, others which can lead to marginalisation. Conversely, 'extreme connectedness' and low differentiation can curtail an individual's sense of uniqueness and agency which can lead to difficulties adapting to new circumstances. These ideas have



considerable significance to my discussion, below, about the nature and impact of communities of practice.

As I have indicated, while working with the Connexions PAs and listening to the words they used to describe their experience of change, I was struck by the many parallels between that experience and some of the identity theories discussed above. As I will go on to discuss in chapters 5 and 6, the PAs frequently referred to a striving for continuity with a previous sense of self in relation to their professional identity. That process was often related to expressions of their experience of competence – or the lack of it – and to comments about what they might become and what they were afraid of becoming. Significantly also, the importance of a 'sense of belonging' also emerged as an important resource in contributing to PAs resilience in the face of the challenge and confusion presented by their new, unfamiliar role. Before discussing the experiences of the PAs in my research in more depth, however, I will firstly turn to a consideration of some of the literature that has explored the impact of change on professional identities.

### **Professional Identity and Change**

As I have noted in the previous chapter, there has been widespread concern, in many quarters, that the 'more restricted vision' (Miller, 2004:93) of policies associated with 'managerialism', 'New Public Management', and 'modernisation' clashed with the more discursive cultures traditionally found within the public sector. A number of commentators have explored the impact on professional identities of these shifts towards, what is considered to be a more accountable culture with an emphasis on 'performativity' (Avis, 2003). Many of these commentators make reference to the resulting 'state of flux' (Stronach et al., 2002:132) surrounding notions of professional identity, and to a challenge to the 'normative space' (Henkel, 2000:261) of practitioner values and self esteem that help to illustrate the context within which my research is set.

More recently still, there has been a growing body of research into the impact on professional identities of moves towards more multi-agency and inter-professional practice. Frost et al. (2005), for example, have noted that in multi-agency teamwork, professional knowledge boundaries can become blurred and professional identity can become challenged as roles and responsibilities change. Such changes, they note, 'can generate discomfort, anxiety and anger' as team members 'struggle to cope with the disintegration of one version of professional identity before a new version can be



built' (p.188). Moreover, they claim, the rapid pace of reform leaves little time for adjustment before the next wave of change.

This state of 'crisis' or 'flux' has relevance for helping to understanding the experience of the Connexions PAs described in this thesis. The main focus of my own research, however, is on the processes by which identities are negotiated in contexts where there is, as yet, no 'normative space' (Henkel, 2000). Hunter (2003:333) has suggested that existing research has tended to be carried out within the context of 'changing notions of professional power, efficiency, competence and accountability'. My aim is to move beyond such analyses and contribute to understandings about the processes by which professional identity evolves.

### **Structure and Agency**

Halford and Leonard (1999) have asserted that two approaches to conceptualising the relationship between work and identity have tended to dominate the literature. One of these sees individuals' distinctive identities developing as a consequence of their occupation; that is, that 'who we are' is constructed out of 'what we do' and that identity is etched onto individuals as they fill certain occupational roles. While personal choice may play some initial role in the choice of occupation, from that point onwards individuals develop distinctive identities as a consequence of their structural location.

The other perspective takes the view that individuals' innate and preformed identities are seen to determine the way in which work is carried out, so that 'what we do' is constructed out of 'who we are'. This approach views each of us as a unique soul. Here work is seen as an agentic activity – a way of expressing our 'true' identity. Halford and Leonard (1999) have concluded that the majority of change management initiatives work from a 'structural' interpretation in striving to create a new organisational culture or identity, with organisations trying to 'bend individual identities to their own imperatives' while failing to take sufficient account of the values or 'agentic needs' that underpin many people's professional identities. They argue that this approach often leads to individuals 'resisting or circumventing' the imposed changes in order to maintain their own identities.

Halford and Leonard (1999) concluded that change cannot take place in the abstract, independent of the individuals who constitute the organisation. Change, they argue, depends, in part, on the identification of staff with the new values and priorities. In other words, change will only take place if individuals 'live out' or 'embody' the new practices



(p.107). They also argued that neither the structural nor the agentic model are 'wholly sufficient' to explain the shifting transitional and interactive picture of identity, or identities, and they called for the development of a 'discursive conceptualisation' of identity that emphasises the operation of 'multiple and competing discourses'.

Ibarra's (1999) work with 'mid-career managers undergoing a career change' illustrated some of the complexity surrounding this structure-agency dualism. Ibarra drew on the 'possible selves' (Markus and Nurius, 1986) construct to explore the processes through which people adapt to and grow into new career roles. She found that the managers in her study experimented with 'provisional selves' that served as trials for possible, but not yet fully elaborated, professional identities. Ibarra discovered that individuals explored and tested out potential or 'provisional' identities in an iterative, cyclical fashion, continuously 'figuring out how to transfer old preferences and values to new and different contexts and how to integrate those with changing priorities' (Ibarra, 2003:163).

In describing what she called 'true-to-self strategies' for testing out 'provisional selves', Ibarra drew attention to 'the role of individual agency' in constructing identities. She found that a dominant theme in the experiences of her research participants was the degree of congruence between 'their provisional constructions' and 'conceptions of the kind of professional they were and aspired to be'. Many of her interviewees reported having taken on a structural identity associated with the organisation or institution within which they had been working. In many cases, the 're-invention' process they underwent involved breaking free from this identity to re-discover their 'possible selves'.

The difference between Ibarra's work and my research is that she was investigating the process of 're-invention' or 'mid-career change' predominantly from the perspective of individuals who *chose* to make that change. Nevertheless, her conclusion that changing one's professional identity is 'a process that allows us to get back in touch with forgotten selves, to reorder priorities, and to explore long-standing or newfound interests', has considerable significance for my own findings, as I will discuss in chapter six.

### **Communities of Practice**

As I have discussed above, recent years have witnessed a growing interest in uncovering the factors that contribute to some people developing resilience in the face of adversity. As we have seen, one of these is thought to include having a network or



secure 'base-camp' wherein the exploration of possible selves might take place (Gilligan, 2000). In a similar vein, there has recently been a developing interest in the notion of 'communities of practice' and their relationship to the sustainability of professional identities.

Etienne Wenger (1998:149), one of the originators of this notion, distinguished five dimensions of identity which he argued address the complexity of the social, cultural and political aspects of identity formation:

- i) identity as negotiated experiences where we define who we are by the ways we experience ourselves through participation in the various communities to which we belong, as well as the way we and others reify ourselves;
- ii) identity as community membership where we define who we are by the familiar and the unfamiliar;
- iii) identity as a learning trajectory where we define who we are by where we have been and where we are going;
- iv) identity as nexus of multi-membership where we define ourselves by the ways we reconcile our various forms of identity into one identity
- v) identity as a relation between the local and the global where we define who we are by negotiating local ways of belonging to broader constellations and manifesting broader styles and discourses.

These dimensions are resonant of some of the ideas discussed earlier in this chapter, such as the process of 'othering' (Erikson, 1968); the unconscious striving for a 'continuing same' (Erikson, 1968); the notion of exploration of 'possible selves' (Markus and Nurius, 1986); and the 'paradoxical association' (Adams and Marshall, 1996) between the seemingly opposing factors of the need for a sense of uniqueness and the need for connectedness with others. Wenger (1998) suggested that there is an interactive and dynamic interplay between the identities of individuals and the communities to which they are affiliated, in the same way that Adams and Marshall (1996) argued that identity construction is dependent on both a sense of uniqueness and a sense of belonging. An individual's identity, they argued, is not only shaped by the community, but that individual's identity can also shape and change the nature of that community. 'Interactions between systems result in exchanges which facilitate the adaptive evolution of the systems' (Adams and Marshall, 1996:432). As Hunter (2003: 339) has also put it, 'relationships involve interdependence; connection arises out of



the recognition of differentiation and implies the potential for valuing the 'other' as a unique but connected individual'.

The notion of 'communities of practice' has gained significant ground in recent years and a number of researchers have begun to consider the issues of challenge and change to professional identities from within a communitarian or communities of practice framework. Mary Henkel (2000) drew on communitarian theory to develop a conceptual framework within which to understand academic identities. Her analysis is also located in Hall's (1992) social theory debate as to whether dislocations in the structures and processes of societies in late modernity have undermined the conditions for individuals to acquire and sustain strong identities. The communitarian perspective, she argues, embraces the agency/structure dualism within which it is possible to see academics as both distinctive individuals and embedded in the communities of primary importance to them. The concept of identity represented by the communitarian tradition, she suggests, emphasises the importance of community values and the importance of a 'defining community' in the formulation and maintenance of identity.

The central question in Henkel's research was how far academic identities were affected by the major reforms of Higher Education in the latter part of the twentieth century. She defined 'identities' as values, self-perceptions, assumptions and agendas and she was interested to find out the extent to which these shifted in the face of political and institutional transformation. She found that, initially, the impact of the transformations in Higher Education caused a 'drastic loss of identity' for some members of the academic profession as they acquired 'a new undesirable status' (p.260). 'Their normative space had been invaded and their sense of self esteem had been shaken' (p.261).

The strategies for responding to these threats to their identity, described in Henkel's research, ranged from what she called strategies for 'conservation' through strategies for 'accommodation' (p.261). Strategies for conservation might include such approaches as 'ignoring' change', 'wilful misunderstanding', or 'overt compliance without much actual change'. Henkel argued that these strategies tended to have only short term effectiveness. A strategy of accommodation, on the other hand, 'may prove to be either one of accommodating change within existing frames of reference, or accommodating to it' (p.264). Henkel found that those adopting a strategy of accommodation, 'gradually assimilated new languages and new modes of management, leaving individuals and departments more in tune with, and able to adapt



to, a changing environment but with their values, beliefs and agendas essentially undisturbed' (p. 264).

Reflecting on these strategies, she concluded that a picture of a 'relatively adaptive' profession emerged. However, capacities to sustain control of their 'identity project' varied according to the amount of 'capital' they had built up (p.265). Her analysis is that the strength of 'community capital' individuals had built up contributed to their ability to sustain their identity values in the face of structural change. Concepts of social capital within communitarian theory, Henkel (2000) argues, are central to the stability of academic identity. The more 'capital' built up, the harder it is to change academic values and practices through the imposition of new purposes and structures from different policy and cultural arenas. Identity, in this analysis, she stresses, is not fixed and it may undergo substantial shifts, but the possibilities for reconstructing identity are limited since some stability and coherence are implied in the institutions or communities through which identities are built (p.15).

Sachs (2003) reflected on communities of practice frameworks for considering how to respond to the 'state of flux' surrounding the professional identity of teachers (p.123). Teachers, she suggests, are working in conditions characterised by increased public scrutiny. She argues that this 'new managerialist discourse' has led to the emergence of what she calls 'entrepreneurial professional identities', whereby teachers come to identify with the 'efficient, responsible and accountable version of public service currently promulgated by the state' and become compliant (p.128). She argues instead for increased opportunities for professional dialogue between teachers in order that they might develop 'activist identities'.

Sachs suggested that 'networks of practice', wherein the open flow of ideas is encouraged 'regardless of their popularity', can provide important frameworks for nurturing resilient and activist identities. Sachs' analysis leads her to conclude that communities of practice can provide the context and conditions for teachers to be 'strategic and tactical' in developing an activist identity because they facilitate values of respect, reciprocity and collaboration. Communities of practice, she argued, are 'collegial, negotiated and they form and reform around specific issues' (p.133).

A number of commentators, however, have recently begun to criticise the notion of 'community of practice' for its emphasis on collegiality and commonality at the expense of diversity (Eraut, 2002) and for its inability to embrace multi-professional learning



(Taylor, 2004; Frost et al., 2005). Avis (2005), for example, has taken issue with analyses, such as that by Sachs, that argue for the development of high levels of trust and co-operation. He suggests that the 'collaborative and participatory practices' that Sachs' 'activist professionals' engage in are 'ultimately rooted within a consensual politics' (p.215) that serves to legitimise or resolve differences and enable the system to continue to function smoothly. While dissent can be acknowledged and seen as valuable because it contributes to innovative problem solving, Avis argues that it is often held in check through the deliberative processes and the formation of a working consensus. He criticises Sachs' analysis as proposing a framework wherein differences are resolved in 'an acceptable manner' and where conflicts are 'accommodated' (p.215). Gilchrist (2004) has also observed how notions of 'network' and 'community' can have their downside, with relationships not always being universally beneficial either for the individual or society as a whole. She points out that where people tend to associate with 'people who are like themselves' this can lead to exclusivity and to the maintenance of only those connections that are 'comfortable or convenient' (p.101).

Ibarra (1999) made a similar observation from her research findings of managers exploring new 'provisional selves'. She found that there were clear longer term benefits for participants who reported emotive dissonance or feelings of 'inauthenticity' when adopting styles and behaviours that 'did not feel very self-congruent'. The 'clear and immediate feedback' concerning the inadequacy of provisional selves tended to motivate a 'renewed search for images that better fit self and situation.'

'By contrast, participants using true-to-self strategies were less likely to experience the unpleasant emotions provoked by "faking it" and as a result were slower to discard provisional selves that were clearly inadequate for meeting new role requirements.' (Ibarra, 1999:779)

The points that are being made here are that 'communities' or networks of 'like-minded people' can become protective cliques that not only exclude others but can also lead to the perpetuation of poor and unaccountable practice. Mark Smith (2003a) makes a similar observation, exposing 'a danger' with Lave and Wenger's (1991) description of the way in which individuals are 'subsumed' into the community identity and learn to 'speak, act and improvise in ways that make sense in the community'. Smith suggests that there may be situations where the community of practice 'is weak or exhibits power relationships that seriously inhibit entry and participation' (p.5). Furthermore.



communities of practice can lead to a sense of complacency and an unwillingness to explore practice. As Wenger suggests, 'when we are with a community of practice of which we are a full member, we are in familiar territory..... we experience competence and we are recognised as competent, we know how to engage with others, we understand why they do what they do ... moreover we share the resources they use to communicate' (1998:152). Comforting and tempting as this model sounds there is a danger that such communities could fail to challenge the thinking and values behind some of our more comfortable assumptions and practices. Furthermore, as Eraut (2002) has suggested, when communities of practice 'are dysfunctional' there is a danger that 'the role of individual agency will be ignored' (p.4). The strong sense of conformity that emerges can be indicative of the community's self-regulation of its members which can be fundamentally disempowering to newcomers.

### **Expansive Communities**

Eraut (2002) has suggested that Lave and Wenger's (1991) focus tends to be on the 'reproductive nature' of communities as newcomers are inducted and continue to acquire competence and status within them. He argues that this model consistently emphasises commonalities rather than diversity and takes for granted that members of the community will have common, rather than conflicting, interests. Warrington et al. (2004) agree, arguing that 'communities of practice' are too often characterised by tight connections and compact work settings, in which participants construct 'mutually defining identities' and a shared vision of practice. They suggest that, in relation to the growing necessity for inter-professional work, this model implies an unrealistic and unsustainable degree of consensus.

Frost et al. (2005) have similarly argued that practitioners in a single profession, or single agency, setting tend not to be required to justify the conceptual base of their actions or interactions. In a multi-agency or multi-professional setting, however, 'differences potentially collide as boundaries around specialisms are broken down' (p.189).

'At this point implicit knowledge must be made explicit. This may involve discarding specialised vocabularies, which can be a painful process'.  
(Frost et al., 2005:189)

Warrington et al. (2004) highlight Engeström's (1999) model of 'activity theory', within which 'contradictions or internal tensions' are depicted as the engines of change, as an



alternative approach. Engeström's work has focused on the challenges presented by moves towards increased inter-agency and inter-professional working and has, therefore, considerable relevance to my own investigation. Engeström argued (1999:12) that the 'instability and inner contradictions' of practice are missing from the 'communities of practice' framework. Instead, he argued that 'activity systems' allow for agency to be conferred on an individual, or sub-group, working within the context of a community.

Engeström (2001) described a 'divided terrain' wherein inter-agency practice is located but where, usually, little collaboration is evident. His premise is that in such contexts tensions are inevitable as tasks are redefined, reassigned and re-distributed within changing organisational contexts. If progress is to be made towards creating new forms of knowledge and practice, differences must be articulated and debated openly. One of the principles behind his approach is the 'central role of contradictions as sources of change and development' (Engeström, 2001:137) and this has sometimes been interpreted as promoting 'conflict' as a source for change (Smith, P., 2003). Engeström, however, emphasises that 'contradictions' are not the same as 'problems or conflicts' and that although such contradictions can generate 'disturbances and conflicts' they can also often promote innovative and transformative practice.

Engeström argues that when contradictions in practice are introduced, as they are in inter-agency team working, or through the introduction of new roles, some individual participants begin to 'question and deviate from established norms' and that sometimes this escalates into what he calls 'collaborative envisioning'. The emphasis placed on consensual models of working, he argues, places constraints on 'expansive learning' (Engeström, 2001) which is a concept that allows for the collaborative construction of new forms of activity in 'emergent situations where routines may not exist'. In order to negotiate change, the professionals involved in expansive learning must work through processes, articulating differences, exploring alternatives and modelling solutions.

Engeström (2001) has also developed the notion of 'boundary crossing', wherein collaboration between practitioners can be conceived of in terms of 'spaces created for renegotiation of professional practices and the reconfiguration of professional identities'. Boundary crossing, he argues, implies a creative movement between traditionally separate professional cultures and allows collaboration to encompass internal tensions as well as consensus.



'[Where] practitioners from diverse cultures... are working in shared activities, their professional learning is expanded as they negotiate working practices that cross traditional professional boundaries.' (Engeström, 2001:6)

Warmington et al. (2004) have suggested that such an analysis offers a conceptualisation of 'learning in practice' that is dependent on 'horizontal movements across contexts and across boundaries of professional expertise' such that the criteria of 'expert' are different in the various contexts (p.47). This is a relationship 'marked by mutual learning and by the collaborative and discursive construction of tasks'. Significantly, this move towards 'distributed expertise' is characterised by a shift away from 'compact teams or professional networks' (p.4) towards a continuously changing connection of practitioners and service users. Eraut (2002:3) has suggested that Engeström's 'activity system' could, therefore, be described as 'starting from the practice end of a community', whereas Lave and Wenger's emphasis is on 'the community end'. I have found these frameworks helpful in understanding the process of identity evolution as experienced by some of the PAs in my research. As I will note in chapters 5 and 6, those practitioners were faced with the challenge of embracing diversity in practice, while not sacrificing the beliefs and values which underpinned their identity. They were challenged to reflect on which beliefs about practice were imbued with core values and which could be modified through the development of new forms of knowledge and practice.

Avis (2003; 2005) also supports the development of 'expansive learning communities' that link practitioners to wider social movements and lead to the questioning of one's own knowledge base. He called for work relations that provide space for dialogue and creativity in order to respond to the 'uncertainties, risks and opportunities that currently exist'. However, he cautions that such possibilities are constrained in a number of ways (2005:218). The 'lived realities' of practitioners, he suggests, often preclude the opportunity to engage in such practices. Avis suggests that the reality for most practitioners is a 'culture of performativity', wherein a 'regime of truth that refuses and silences other conceptualisations of good practice' becomes established. Avis argues that a performance culture marked by an emphasis on accountability is not one in which risk taking or the development of creative problem solving will readily take place and suggests that it is, actually, 'at odds with' current strictures surrounding the knowledge economy which emphasise 'fluidity, non-hierarchical team work and high trust relations linked to the development of human, intellectual and social capital' (Avis.



2005:212). Performance management, he asserts, stifles innovation and encourages deeply conservative practices.

In this chapter I have given an overview of a range of theoretical approaches to considering issues of identity construction, maintenance and transition. A strong theme to emerge from many of these approaches is that the very idea of 'identity' is in a state of flux, due to the constant and ongoing change that is challenging the central structures of our social world. As Hall (1992:287) has suggested, there is a continuous sense of incompleteness about our identities. They are always 'in process of being formed'. This sense of incompleteness and increased uncertainty is seen as affecting the identities of young people as well as those who work with them. In the context of this turmoil, attention has begun to focus on the factors that can contribute to the maintenance of a more resilient sense of identity. One of the concepts found to be helpful, in this regard – for young people and for professionals – is the notion of belonging to a 'community' or 'network'. As I have noted in the latter part of this chapter, however, the conceptualisation of 'community' has recently come under increased scrutiny in relation to its role in helping people move forward in an 'expansive' or 'transformative' way.

I will return to a consideration of many of these themes and concepts in chapter 6 when I discuss the findings from my research with Connexions Personal Advisers. Before that, in the following chapter, I will discuss the methodological approach that I have adopted for this inquiry and explore some of the tensions associated with it.



## **4. Methodology and evolution of the design**

As described in previous chapters, I had been involved with the participants in my research since 2001 through my role as a trainer on the Diploma training programme for Connexions PAs. I perceive that process as a 'co-inquiry' (Oliver, 2004) in which I was learning about Connexions and the PA role alongside the participants. As a consequence, I entered the research phase of the EdD, in 2003, with many pre-formed understandings about how the PAs were adapting to their new role and the challenges they were experiencing. This prior exposure to their views had become part of my own internal dialogue and growing understanding, and inevitably informed my thinking and assumptions when designing the research.

My involvement with the Connexions PAs, through the Diploma training programme, led to my developing an interest in exploring with them their perceptions and experience of professional identity within their new professional role. I wanted to find out whether, and how, practitioners constructed new professional identities and whether, and how, they managed the threats to their 'old' professional identities, when placed in new, blended roles that have no established community of practice. With the continuing policy drive towards 'joined-up' working and the creation of new, blended roles in health, education and social care, my aim was to develop an understanding of the ways such change impacts on the professional identities adopted by those involved. Ibarra (1999:765) has argued that despite an apparent consensus in the literature 'that identity changes accompany work role changes, the processes by which (professional) identity evolves remain under explained'. The aim of my inquiry, therefore, was to contribute to understandings surrounding that process. In particular, the aim of my research was to develop an understanding of the strategies Connexions PAs used to help them construct and re-negotiate their identities during times of change. The questions that helped to frame my research were:

- What are the factors that contribute to developing a professional identity?
- In what ways does a change of role and title affect one's professional identity?
- What strategies do people use as they confront threats to their previous identity and enter new roles that have no established community of practice?



- How do people re-negotiate and stabilise their professional identity within the reality of their new role?

As Gerson and Horowitz (2002:200) have pointed out, the research process is rarely straightforward and will typically involve facing problems 'out of order' and coping simultaneously with a variety of methodological and theoretical conundrums. Indeed, they suggest, a 'significant advantage' of the qualitative approach is its flexibility in allowing the researcher to move back and forth in a cyclical way as the discovery of theoretical insights prompts adjustments in the research design. My experience of engaging in this research reflects their analysis. The process has not been a straightforward or linear one for me. The methodology that I have used throughout this inquiry has involved me in an iterative journey between data collection, reflection on literature and reflection on findings as the analysis has gradually developed out of the emergent themes. I have experienced difficulty in trying to present a coherent 'story' of the research I have been engaged in with a beginning, middle and end – and at times I have even been unsure where 'the beginning' was.

Lewis (2003:47) emphasises the importance of such a flexible approach to research design for being able to embrace the unexpected issues that emerge. Design, in qualitative research, she argues, is not a discrete stage which is concluded early in the life of a study. It is a continuing process which calls for constant review of decisions and approaches. Although it is important to have a 'good sense of the substantive issues that the research topic involves', Lewis suggests that the relationship between design, data and theory is a multi-directional one and early decisions about design need to be reviewed as the study proceeds and new ideas emerge (Lewis, 2003:49).

A recurrent tension that I experienced while engaged in this exploration with Personal Advisers was describing to others (and indeed to myself) what my research was 'about'. I was therefore, much encouraged to come across the work of Allen (2003:11), whose assertion that sooner or later 'someone is likely to ask you what your research is all about' helped me to understand that I was not alone. He reassured me that my doubts that 'last week's question, which seemed so apt at the time, is now beginning to look a little unfocused, woolly even, as new angles emerge and fresh questions take shape in your mind' were not unusual. Allen's helpful discussion of Said's (1978) philosophy of 'beginnings' helped to contextualise some of my own thinking. According to Allen (2003:14), Said maintained that, 'whatever it is you have had thoughts on is already a project under way', but that also 'beginning' implies 'return and repetition'



where the work of reflection and iteration are part of the sustained activity. For Said, any starting point 'places the project in relation to all that has gone before' and 'beginning again' implies 'intention' and 'gives direction to what follows'. This process of reflection and iteration is key to the methodological approach adopted in this study, where the issues and themes have emerged from an evolving landscape.

### **Grounded Theory**

The methodological orientation of my research can best be described with reference to analyses of Grounded Theory, an approach to research first described by Glaser and Strauss (1967). According to Denscombe (2003:14), Glaser and Strauss considered themselves to be Phenomenologists, an approach he describes as 'an alternative to positivism' (p.96). By this he means that Phenomenology is an approach that emphasises 'subjectivity rather than objectivity, description rather than analysis, interpretation rather than measurement'. Phenomenological research, according to Denscombe, generally deals with people's 'perceptions or meanings; attitudes and beliefs; feeling and emotions'. It is an approach that focuses on 'how life is experienced'. Phenomenological research stresses the importance of 'seeing things through the eyes of others', of presenting the views of those involved in the research as faithfully as possible and providing a 'description of matters that adequately portrays how (they) experience the situation' (Denscombe, 2003:99). Phenomenology rejects the notion that there is one universal reality and accepts, instead, that things can be seen in different ways by different people at different times in different circumstances, and that each alternative version needs to be recognised as being valid in its own right.

Grounded Theory has been described as a 'trail of discovery' with each new phase of the investigation reflecting what has been discovered so far (Denscombe, 2003:111). In this framework, theories are 'grounded' and built up systematically from emergent data. Glaser and Strauss directly challenged the value of theorising and then doing some empirical work to see if the theory works. In their view it is much better to gradually build up and develop the theories on the basis of the empirical research. So, from careful observations and immersion in the world of the 'researched', the researcher builds theories from patterns they observe in their data (Alston and Bowles, 2003). The approach is not the same as gathering as much data as possible and then letting it speak for itself. Rather, it is inductive, moving from specific observations or interactions to general ideas and theories. Always high on the agenda for grounded theory research is a concerted effort to analyse and generate theories from the data.



In an ideal world, researchers working from this framework should have 'no preconceived ideas' (Alston and Bowles, 2003) but should allow patterns and themes to emerge from their experiences. However, as Denscombe (2003) rightly points out, it is rarely feasible to adopt such an extreme interpretation and to rid ourselves entirely of our pre-suppositions. Having an open mind is not the same thing as having an 'empty mind' (Lewis, 2003:49). Denscombe, suggests that it is more realistic to accept that previous theories and personal experience will have an influence as providing a 'beginning focus' for the researcher to start from. Researchers, like other people, use common-sense assumptions when interpreting events and we need to be able to stand back and become aware of them and make an effort to minimise their impact. The crucial point, Denscombe stresses, is that whatever is already 'known' about a topic, the concepts are to be treated as 'provisional' (Denscombe, 2003: 116).

### **A Reflective Journey**

This particular journey began, for me, in 2001 with a contract to deliver the Connexions training programme. Since then I have been immersed in tracking and evaluating the development of the Connexions strategy and its impact on the associated workforce with some of the Personal Advisers as my fellow travellers. My reflective journey through confusion and insight has been alongside many of those front line workers, as together we have tried to make sense of the new strategy and to understand what their role in it was and could be. The original data I collected as part of the iterative co-inquiry had primarily been gathered through what I have called the 'issue logs' (Oliver, 2004) generated by the participants on each live training day. Additional data were generated through participant module and course evaluations and from participants' submitted assignments. A consistent theme to emerge from all these data sources was the confusion surrounding questions such as, 'Who and what is Connexions?' and, 'Who and what is a Personal Adviser?'

Just as the PAs came to the training programme, and to Connexions, from a range of previous occupational backgrounds, so too did the trainers. My own immediate background was as a Youth and Community Work educator within a university. However, prior to working in the university I had been a practitioner in voluntary and community sector settings, working in a community development role with young people and young adults. My espoused practice values were informed by the work of Paulo Freire (1972) who advocated a 'bottom-up', person centred and reflective approach to empowering individuals and communities to challenge the status quo. These values, and this occupational path, had, in turn, been influenced by my own



earlier social, economic and educational experiences. From this position, I have in my practice and in my teaching sought to challenge traditional notions of professional 'expertise' and to encourage collaborative approaches that value the experience and 'expertise' of participants/service users.

My experience of working alongside Connexions PAs, on the Diploma training programme, had led me to develop a positive view of the possibilities of their new role. Along with many other trainers and participants, I welcomed the apparent espousal, by policy makers, of the values behind the Connexions principles. They represented, on the face of it, a welcome recognition of holistic and young person centred practice. It was also my experience, and that of training providers in other universities with whom I networked, that many PAs came to the training programme recognising and welcoming the ambitious nature of the new Connexions Service. However, as I have described elsewhere (Oliver, 2002; 2004) it soon became clear that there was a gap between the idealistic rhetoric in the policy and in the training materials and the reality of practice as experienced by PAs 'on the ground'. On the training course, PAs frequently reported feeling pulled between working in a person centred way, trying to build relationships and respond to young people's stated needs and increasing pressure over a whole range of management imposed targets.

As we worked with successive cohorts of participants on the Diploma programme, the importance of the opportunity to explore their role with others in the group emerged as a key theme (Oliver, 2004). In the early days of our involvement in delivery of the programme we had tended to follow the prescribed course design. As we began to develop the courage of our own convictions as educators, and as we began to collect increasing evaluative evidence that participants felt 'patronised' and 'bored' by the quality of the written materials, we gradually introduced more group based activity. Increasingly, our participant evaluations reflected the significance of the insights on practice and policy issues that they had gained from exploring issues with their peers, in what we came to call 'Critical Reflection Groups'. This approach involved questioning the assumptions and 'taken-for-granted' embodied in both theory and professional practice and is similar to the process used by those who work with young people in youth work contexts. Such practitioners use 'appropriate' questioning skills to explore with young people the range of issues and hopes affecting their choices and actions. Hence, I felt it would be appropriate to encourage a similar model of learning and reflection amongst the practitioners themselves.



Winter and Munn-Giddings (2001) have argued that professional practice and research into professional practice should share the same value base, and that if the value base of professional practice is 'empowerment', participatory forms of research are called for which can encompass 'not just the subjective experience of those to be studied, but their active contribution'. I therefore approached not only the Connexions training programme and the role of Personal Adviser, but also my inquiry into the PAs experience, with a perspective derived from my community youth work background. Banks (1999:3) has suggested that this is a perspective concerned about 'professional integrity, trustworthiness and honesty in relation to its service users' and is underpinned by principles that 'respect young people's rights, respect cultural diversity and work for participatory democracy'.

Jeffs and Smith (1996) have suggested that youth workers develop relationships with young people primarily through 'conversation' which involves 'concern, trust, respect, appreciation, affection and hope' and that, in order to build and maintain trust with young people, workers need to be 'fair, truthful, punctilious about fulfilling obligations, thoughtful and unselfish in their conduct' (p.53). These are the values that have informed my approach. Allowing people's 'voices' to be heard, to enable them to say 'how it is' for them, rather than telling them how it 'should be', is an important principle in any empowering approach to development or research. As a consequence, I felt that any approach to research or collaborative enquiry with Connexions Personal Advisers should be one that was 'illuminative', 'educative' or 'developmental' and one from which not only I, as a researcher, but all the participants, gained insights or knowledge.

Such approaches are, nevertheless, difficult to achieve and as McKie (2002:280) has suggested, even if honest about the power basis, the researcher 'will be considered to have exercised their subjectivity on (the) data'. Winter and Munn-Giddings (2001:185) make a similar point when they argue that, when attempting such approaches to research, we should always be aware of the politics of power involved. The 'power of the researcher's expertise' they suggest, always threatens to 'disempower the community members'. They suggest that one way of attempting to reduce the status and power differentiations within the research process is if the researcher places herself, 'methodologically alongside other project participants' by 'systematically subjecting herself to the risks and challenges of investigating' her own role in the process (p.186). The researcher's assumptions should be available to be questioned by others if the aim of the research is to learn.



I have written elsewhere (Oliver, 2002; 2003; 2004) about the challenge to, and conflict with, my own values and approach that I, and others, experienced in the early years of the Connexions training programme. As people who thought of ourselves as 'educators', most of the tutors around the country experienced initial difficulties with the highly prescriptive training materials and the target driven approach to the management of training delivery. In many ways this created an experience for the trainers which was not dissimilar to that of the PAs we were training, and resulted in our 'co-inquiry' approach (Oliver, 2004). While this experience did lead to the development of comfortable and collegiate relationships with the PAs who became my research participants, it also introduced a methodological tension. There was an ever present danger that my close involvement with the participants and their experience could lead me to shape the issues, the interpretations and the conclusions.

### **Issues of Power and Voice**

It is commonly recognised that truly collaborative and participatory research is difficult to achieve because of the continuum of participation and the degrees of power sharing that may be involved. Heron (1996:28), for example, has criticised those who argue that participative enquiry is 'empowering', pointing out that in the majority of cases participants have been 'lured' into a 'design in which they are not invited to collaborate, and to which, at best they are only invited to give informed consent'.

In recent years, a number of writers (Lather, 1991; Fielding, 1996; Colley, 2003) have subjected the concept of 'empowerment' to interrogation, exposing its increasingly contested nature. Fielding (1996) suggests that the problem is one of semantics. The 'burgeoning use' of the notion of empowerment, he argues, has gone hand in hand with its 'increasingly elusive meaning', leading many writers to approach the concept with 'cynicism' and 'suspicion'. Like Fielding, I believe that such a response is inappropriate. 'However fatuous or pretentious its utterance, empowerment is neither trivial nor trite in its ambitions or consequences' (p.399). The danger, as Fielding sees it, with the use of the word 'empowerment' is that we are likely to be 'confused or duped or both' as the meanings surrounding the concept become 'increasingly ubiquitous and decreasingly helpful' (p.400).

Both Fielding (1996:401) and Colley (2003:140) offer analyses of the different interpretations and uses of the term. Colley's 'classical model' and Fielding's 'process view' both represent power as something that is handed on from the powerful to those whom they decide are 'appropriate' recipients. Power is seen as 'a commodity' (Colley.



2003) or as 'a property' (Fielding, 1996) which is transferred from one agent to another. Fielding (1996) suggests that this approach to 'empowerment' is frequently vulnerable to 'political hijack' and that one of the difficulties within this conceptualisation is 'the extent to which those doing the empowering retain control, often in covert rather than open ways' - what he calls 'empowerment as manipulation' (p.401).

'To make the question of values and purposes extrinsic to the notion of empowerment is to run a much greater risk of empowerment being used as a buzz word while enabling those who do the 'empowering' to covertly get on with the real business of ensuring the world remains much the same as it is.'  
(Fielding, 1996:405)

The argument here is that if 'empowerment' leaves traditional structures and processes untouched, it can only ever be regarded as empowerment 'in a minimalist sense'. This is a rhetorical, or tokenistic, approach to 'empowerment', often shrouded in hyperbole. As Fielding argues, the consequences of such 'inappropriate semantic ambition' are, frequently, 'cynicism and disillusionment' (p.403). An analysis such as this has much in common with criticisms of the espoused 'social inclusion' agenda as advanced by Levitas (2005) and discussed in chapter two. From this perspective, it could be argued that the aim of Connexions and the role of the Connexions PA was to 'empower' young people to re-engage with education or employment in ways that might not be of their choosing or timing.

The 'emancipatory account' (Fielding, 1996:403) or 'collective model' (Colley, 2003:140) of empowerment, on the other hand, makes its value base explicit. This tradition argues that it is values and purposes which provide the impetus and capacity to bring about change. The in-built inequalities between disadvantaged and advantaged people are acknowledged and 'attempts are made to facilitate collective activities which can challenge oppression and exploitation' (Colley, 2003). Within this view there is an 'obligation to challenge, critique and question' in ways which 'push the powerful back onto their ethical and political haunches' (Fielding, 1996:406). It is this 'version' of empowerment that resonates with my own practice values and beliefs as outlined above. It is a perspective that is transparent about its commitment to certain values and is therefore open to explicit challenge or agreement. However, as both Fielding (1996) and Colley (2003) point out, it has recently come under sustained attack from within post-modern critiques.



This 'empowerment as impossible fiction' account (Colley, 2003) has suggested that much of the 'passion and ambition' (Fielding, 1996) of the emancipatory approach to empowerment is often experienced as 'debilitating' and 'immobilising' within the structural reality and context of daily life (Fielding, 1996:408). The 'covert and unrecognised' ways in which individuals 'internalise and reproduce existing relations of power' actually serve to perpetuate 'domination by hegemonic groups' (Colley, 2003:148).

'Those in the emancipatory vanguard are attacked for a seeming reluctance to acknowledge that they too are necessarily susceptible to distortions, limitations and partiality.' (Fielding, 1996:408)

Furthermore, the postmodernist view problematises the nature of power itself. Power is seen as 'relational and self-disciplinary and operating at an infinite number of points, exercised by action at the same time as being undergone' (Colley, 2003:141). In this tradition, power is seen as 'circulating', never localised and as exercised rather than possessed. Individuals are seen as 'vehicles of power, not its point of application' (Foucault, 1980:89).

Fielding (1996:410), dismisses these post-modern critiques of empowerment as 'unsatisfactory' and 'unadventurous', suggesting that these endless attempts to deconstruct notions of power and privilege serve only to 'weaken its engagement with the reality it is trying so hard to transform' (p.411). Language, he argues, constrains as much as it enables and those restrictions and possibilities circumscribe not only our actions but also our sense of who we are and who we might become (p.413). I have some sympathy with this view. Neither in my role as a trainer, reported in an earlier assignment (Oliver, 2003), nor in my role as a researcher, did I adopt or take for granted the language of Connexions. Although I sympathised with the notion of offering a more joined-up advisory service to young people, I did not support the way in which it was implemented nor did I collude with an agenda that sought to coerce young people and Personal Advisers to fit into a system that was not of their choosing. This is the antithesis of what I believe.

My own usage of the term 'empowerment' has more in common with that described by Lather (1991:3). This approach uses empowerment to mean analysing ideas about the causes of powerlessness, recognising systemic oppressive forces and acting



individually and collectively to bring about change. Furthermore, this view of empowerment embodies a process not identified in the analyses by Fielding and Colley above. For me, an essential aspect of empowerment is that it is something one undertakes for oneself. It is not something done 'to' or 'for' someone. 'The heart of the idea of empowerment' for me 'involves people coming into a sense of their own power, a new relationship with their own contexts' (Fox, 1988:2, cited in Lather, 1991:4). It was my aim, both when working with Connexions PAs on the training programme and when engaging with their views through this research, to strive for just such an approach.

Nevertheless, as I have discussed elsewhere (Oliver, 2003) I recognise that there were constraints upon that aim as I and the research participants 'met, danced together and then wandered off' (Huberman, 1991). Furthermore, as has been acknowledged already, no research is entirely without bias, and will always be influenced, to some degree, by the values of the researcher. In addition to the impossibility of value-free research, the issue of how we represent the 'authentic voice' of the research participant in contemporary qualitative research practice has, in recent years, been increasingly questioned. Etherington (2004:83) has suggested that this 'crisis of representation' has been created in response to the falling away of 'traditional notions of truth, reality and knowledge' that previously provided us with familiar structures for presenting our 'findings'. If there is no objective truth to be found, she suggests, then there can be no 'findings', only 're-presentations'.

Dunne et al (2005:132) argue that research is a 'discursive practice of "linguaging"' and that this inevitably leads to the issue of 'the nature of representations and their relation to reality' becoming problematic. In view of this, Adkins (2002:332) advises that we always need to ask, 'Who speaks for whom, why, how and when?'. Fielding (2004:297) has suggested that in speaking about others in research, 'even in the sense of describing what you take to be the case', we may, in effect, be speaking in their place, that is, speaking for them. The very language we use in our descriptions is likely to be 'saturated with values', frequently our own. No descriptive discourse, he argues, is, or can be, value-free. 'Advocacy or interpretation is thus, to some degree ... part of your account'. Furthermore, just as we use our own language to 're-describe or reshape the language of the researched' we also shape the respondents' views through 'control of what is included and excluded in the text' (Fielding, 2004:298). There is, he suggests, an implicit assumption that the inclusion of quotes from research participants is 'empowering' because it is supposed to have 'given them a voice'. However, 'even in benign hands the editorial power of the researcher remains' (p.299).



However, Fielding goes on to argue that if the central problem of speaking 'about others' lies in our tendency to 'mistake or betray' their realities 'in favour of our own', the problem of speaking 'for' others raises further difficulties. In particular there is the 'extent to which the social location or identity of the speaker (or researcher) shapes the way they see and understand the world' (Fielding, 2003:299). One of the outcomes is that inevitably there are 'some voices we wish to hear and others we do not' and in dismissing those that make us feel uncomfortable we may often miss things of importance 'and of a deeper seriousness than our first impressions allow' (Fielding, 2003:303).

In view of this, instead of reporting on the 'findings' from my questionnaires and interviews, I have chosen to head the following chapter 're-presentations'. In doing this I acknowledge that there will inevitably be some voices that have only been partially heard. In my 're-presentation' of the research data I have had to make choices about what to include and what to leave out. While I have endeavoured to include all 'voices' as far as possible in this re-presentation, I am sure that there may be some that I have inadvertently ignored or avoided. As Smith and Deemer (2000:891) remind us, 'We are finite human beings who must learn to accept that anything we write must always and inevitably leave silences, and that to speak at all must always and inevitably be to speak for someone else'. Furthermore, as Etherington (2004:78) reminds us, interpretations will depend on the listener or reader as much as on the narrator. How you, as reader, make sense of the re-presentations offered here 'will depend on what you bring to the reading from your own life and experiences'.

### **The Questionnaire**

No particular method of data collection is claimed to be unique to Grounded Theory. However, according to Denscombe (2003:115) methods must allow for data to be collected in a 'raw state', the point being to 'generate theories not to test them'. In seeking to clarify the issues surrounding role identity confusion, I designed an open-ended questionnaire which I sent to every participant who had completed either the Diploma for Connexions Personal Advisers or the Understanding Connexions module with us at UWE, inviting them to 'continue our joint exploration' in the hope that this might lead us to some insight into how to manage the ongoing change process in which we now found ourselves (see appendices 1, 2 & 3).



'The open-ended nature of the questionnaire seeks to elicit your views and thoughts in so far as you are able to articulate them'.

(Information to participants, March 2004, appendix 2)

The aim of the questionnaire was to elicit the views of the Connexions PAs about their role identity: in relation to young people and to other professionals with whom they work, and in relation to their sense of congruence with any previous or existing professional identity. It was also my intention, at the research design stage, to follow up a smaller sample of respondents with a more in-depth interview. At that stage, however, I was unclear what the focus of the interviews would be or how I would select that sample. These factors became clearer once I had analysed the questionnaires and identified the emergent themes, as we will see on page 63 below.

With my immersion in the participatory exploration of emergent themes in the early stages of inquiry there was the ever present danger that my own interpretations and reflections would shape the questions – and as a result shape the findings. This has been identified as one of the dangers in taking a constructionist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2002) within which the pursuit of emergent themes through early data analysis is a key component. However, Mies (1993:68), amongst others, has argued that the 'postulate of value free research' would be better replaced by one of 'conscious partiality' whereby a 'critical and dialectical distance' is created that enables the 'correction of distortions'. As a result, the questionnaire underwent several stages of modification before I felt confident that it was designed to do the job it was intended to do.

In an attempt to reduce the impact of my own subjectivity, I first 'tested' the reliability of the questionnaire with 'critical friends' from the EdD programme and found their distance from the inquiry enabled them to identify where I was leading the respondents to follow my own emergent thinking. As a result, I radically changed the order and wording of the questions prior to piloting the questionnaire on Connexions PAs. I piloted the questionnaire in March 2004, on a group of 22 PAs still undergoing the training – and who would not therefore be included in the sample. Their understanding of how to answer some of the questions, and the questions they identified as repetitive or problematic, led to further modifications in the design. Even then, responses from some participants indicated the difficulties with finding words or phrases that have shared meanings and definitions. The lack of opportunity to follow up responses with



further probing questions that could help clarify some of these misunderstandings is one of the drawbacks of using questionnaires as a research tool, and why the interviews then became so invaluable.

I asked the pilot group whether, given their case loads and other work priorities, they would be likely to complete the questionnaire if it arrived in their post at work. There was a general consensus of 'probably not', given that it was so long and had taken them 30 – 40 minutes to complete. This led me to reflect on ways to increase the likelihood of a return response. As it happened, the address we had on file for the enrolment of the majority of participants in our training programme was their home address. Whether receiving the questionnaire at home increased the response rate I cannot know. However, there was not only a good response rate, but the quality of the responses (verging on essay proportions in some cases) was also overwhelmingly high. The shopping lists, to-do lists and coffee mug stains added to some questionnaires also gave me some indication that receiving them at home led to a more considered space for reflection and response.

Reflecting on how to amend some of the questions to accommodate observations from the pilot group, I began to consider the overall layout of the questionnaire. This, together with a concern to make it look 'user friendly' and to encourage completion and return rates, caused me to change the layout from 'portrait' to 'landscape' and to create boxes for each question and response. I feel that the final version (see appendix 3) worked well – even though the response boxes were not large enough for the amount that some people felt compelled to write! In addition, after considerable thought on the letter that accompanied the questionnaire (appendix 1), I chose to address and sign them personally rather than electronically, and to adopt a conversational tone that I hoped would reassure participants that I would understand if they 'couldn't be bothered'. It is difficult to evaluate the extent to which these design considerations contributed to the return rate. The high number of returns could be due to the need felt by many respondents to express their feelings.

*"It was really nice to be able to put down on the questionnaire the reality – knowing it was confidential." (PA37: f-sw 10+ i)*

Certainly, all but a handful of returned questionnaires contained full, considered and often emotional 'essays' that seemed to fulfil a cathartic need to be heard, which was perhaps indicative of the stage of confusion and anxiety they were going through at the



time. Not only were the responses of a full and cathartic nature, but there was an apparent eagerness to return the questionnaire and to participate in the research. I was contacted by seven participants who for one reason or another had mislaid the original questionnaire and wanted me to send them another copy. For example:

*“Billie, I can't find your questionnaire. House in tip because husband and off-spring are decorating. This seems to involve every room in the house. Would you send another one if I haven't left it too late?”*  
*(PA194: f-ca 5+ by email)*

### **Analysing the Questionnaires**

Denscombe (2003:8) has suggested that, 'any social researcher will be lucky to get as many as 20% of the questionnaires returned'. I achieved a very encouraging 40% response rate. However, encouraging as this was, it also presented me with some practical difficulties. I was overwhelmed, not only by the response rate, but also by the detail and passion in the comments respondents wrote on the questionnaires. It seemed as though I had touched a very sensitive area and that for many, responding to the questionnaire afforded them a much needed opportunity to express their feelings. This 'need to be heard' emerged as a very strong theme in all the questionnaires, and again in the interviews, and is, I believe, an important factor in facilitating people through a period of change. While it was gratifying that so many people felt inclined to engage with me in this inquiry - and so openly - it also posed concerns for me about the amount of data and how best to make sense of it.

Marvasti (2004) advises that data analysis should not be seen as a separate phase of the research process and that inductive research involves analysing as we go along. The questionnaires did not all arrive back on the same day, or even in the same week, but early on I got a sense of the quantity of data that I was going to have to work with and breaking this task down into manageable chunks became a priority. I therefore devised a series of spreadsheets that would help me to manage the data as it came in. Firstly, I entered the information and responses from each questionnaire onto a spreadsheet that enabled me to see all the responses to the same question (appendices 4 & 5). The amount that some respondents wrote in answer to some of the questions made this a time consuming process but it was useful on two levels. Firstly I was able to access all responses to each question at once, which aided the thematic content analysis. Secondly, entering the raw data from each respondent kept me very



close to it and, as I entered the data from each questionnaire. I could relate the response to the previous one thus developing a growing picture of the overall emergent themes as I went.

Once I had the responses all logged onto the spreadsheets, I was able to work through them, collating the quantitative data from the early questions and searching for common categories and themes in the qualitative data. Charmaz (2002) describes this stage as 'initial coding', a process whereby the researcher notes down the concepts that come to mind as you read through the data. Managing a substantial amount of qualitative data was quite a daunting and time-consuming task and I found that boredom became a threat to rigour as time went on. Entering the data from the questionnaires was a routinised and mechanical task and I began to develop a sense that many people were saying the same thing. I became aware that this could lead me to skimming the responses and so lead me to miss something important. Charmaz (2002) recommends the use of 'memo writing', noting down one's initial interpretations, as a way of elaborating on one's analytical categories and I found the keeping of a 'research journal' a very useful way of maintaining an audit trail of analysis and interpretation, noting my emerging hunches while I was closely engaged in the coding of the data.

I was also conscious that my own subjectivity could lead me to make analyses of the emergent themes that did not represent the views of the respondents. After I had completed the initial thematic analysis, therefore, I tried to overcome this subjectivity by returning to the raw data on the questionnaires to discover *who* had identified with each theme. I found that the emergent themes were representative across the respondent profile and that it was not one particular partnership area or professional grouping raising any particular issue. However, while doing this stage of the analysis, I realised that there were subtleties of difference or even inaccuracies in my initial codings. Revisiting the raw data enabled me to discover one or two recurrent themes that I had not previously captured. This emphasised for me the importance of continually returning to the raw data not only to check for distortion but also to refresh one's perception of what was being said.

As a consequence I devised a further spreadsheet of 'quotes' (appendix 6), where I catalogued the long narrative quotes that many respondents had given. In addition to keeping me close to the raw data, this process facilitated an alternative route to analysing responses for initial thematic content. In this way I was able to validate the



earlier thematic categories I had arrived at. This 'quotation spreadsheet' later proved to be very useful when identifying the sample to interview, as it enabled me to see who was expressing views in terms of change without trawling through all the questionnaires. Additionally, seeing all the quotes set out together in this way considerably strengthened their impact allowing a coherent 'story' to emerge.

According to Charmaz (2002:686), initial coding is followed by the more theoretically sensitive categorisation of data she calls 'focused coding' in which the researcher 'sorts and synthesises' the frequently reappearing initial codes or themes. Focused coding broadens the level of abstraction while simultaneously expanding the range of their application. This process allows us to reduce the possible range of meanings from a large number of initial categories (or codes) to a smaller, more manageable set. This process of focused coding led me to develop the emergent analytical framework for considering the experience of professional identity that I have used in chapter 5. It has to be said, however, that arriving at this thematic framework was not a simple or straightforward process and I was constantly aware of my own subjectivity in allocating individual responses to a particular category. I am also very much aware that, while I have maintained an 'audit trail' of the steps along the way, my eventual interpretations are not statistically verifiable. Having acknowledged this as a limitation, the process of 'focused coding' did lead me to identify five main themes that emerged from all responses across the questionnaire. These were: the significance of shared professional values and approaches to working with young people; the importance of developing a collective view of their role among PAs; the significance of respect and recognition from 'others'; the importance placed on professional qualification and training; and the extent to which the organisation or service one worked within contributed to professional identity. I will return to a discussion of these themes in the following chapter.

### **The Interviews**

As part of my initial research design, and in order to overcome well documented limitations to the qualitative depth of questionnaires, I had intended to follow up a small number of participants through a more in-depth, one-to-one interview. The aim was to give participants an opportunity to elaborate on some of the concepts and themes raised in the questionnaires. The questionnaire included a consent form, so that each participant could indicate their willingness to be contacted for interview. By the time I had finished analysing the questionnaires however, I was beginning to question whether interviews could add anything to the analysis. Responses on the



questionnaires had, in the majority of cases, been so full that I felt I already had some very rich data. In addition, there was a weight of evidence in support of the emergent themes with all responses pointing in the same direction.

It was at this point that I re-engaged with the literature and discovered Ibarra's (1999) work on 'provisional selves' and William's (2000) work on 'relational identity'. This served to refocus my own analysis more towards the process of change and transition in terms of professional identity. Alston and Bowles (2003) define 'theoretical sampling' as being where the sample is chosen to assist the researcher to understand the phenomena under study and to illuminate the researcher's emerging theory. I therefore chose to select for interview respondents who were not only saying (on the questionnaire) something reflective, constructive and illuminating about the common themes that had emerged, but who also seemed to indicate that a 'shift' of some sort had taken place for them – that they had gone through, or identified themselves to be going through, a process of change. The focus for the interviews, then, became why and how this change had been enabled to take place. Denscombe (2003:117) supports this approach, indicating that in Grounded Theory research it is neither feasible nor desirable for the researcher to identify prior to the start exactly who will be included in the sample since the sample will 'emerge from the generating theory'. He further points out that the criterion of 'relevance' is different from that in case study research in that there is no need to demonstrate that the situation under investigation is 'representative'.

'Sites to be included are selected deliberately by the researcher for what they can contribute to the research. Specifically they are selected for their relevance to the emerging categories and concepts.'

(Denscombe, 2003:117).

In selecting respondents for interview, therefore, my main criterion was the reflective, constructive and illuminative nature of their narrative responses on the questionnaire. Having thus identified a 'long list', I then set other criteria. Firstly, I selected only respondents who were working as PAs and were called PAs, as I judged that these participants were more likely to have undergone a challenge to their identity. Of these I tried to include both men and women and participants from a range of previous professional backgrounds. Finally I aimed to include a selection from across all the partnership areas, in case there was some local practice that was relevant. Having used these criteria to identify the respondents I wanted to interview, I then discovered



to my great disappointment that many of them had not given consent to be interviewed. Finally, however, I was able to select 11 participants fitting the above criteria from those who had given their consent to be interviewed.

In preparing for the interviews I extracted each selected respondent's detailed answers from the questionnaire onto an individual spreadsheet. From this I developed an individual interview schedule that aimed to probe some of their views and ideas more deeply and allowed them the opportunity to tell them in their own way. In this respect each interview schedule was different; however, there were common themes around identity construction and change. Cohen and Manion (1994:289) have defined this approach to interviewing as the 'focused interview' within which the researcher uses her prior analysis as a basis for constructing the interview guide. The advantage of this approach is that while the conceptual framework has been established beforehand, the data has not been pre-defined by set questions.

I contacted each prospective interviewee first by email to ascertain their continuing consent, and then by email and telephone to negotiate a time, date and venue convenient to them. The interviews were carried out during November 2004. Each interview lasted for 50 – 60 minutes and was audio-taped. I did not make a literal transcription of the tapes since I was not interested in analysing pauses, hesitations, laughter or grammatical styles. Within the reflective style of the interview, respondents often returned to pick up a train of thought they had started earlier in the conversation. When I replayed the tapes, therefore, what I recorded in type was an edited narrative, in their own words, that omitted hesitations and pauses and grouped the themes of our conversation coherently. In doing this my intention was to create a more coherent narrative without changing the sense or meaning of the interviewees' responses.

As Etherington (2004:78) has observed, however, as we listen and transcribe audio-tapes of interviews, we will 'almost certainly be analysing the data and making choices based upon the theories that we hold'. It is, therefore, necessary to carry out 'member checks' (Etherington 2004:79), checking back with the participants to ensure that their meaning remains intact and inviting them to censor anything that they are not happy with. I, therefore, completed the transcription within one week of the interview while it was still fresh in my mind – and theirs. Having typed up a narrative account of the interview, I then sent it, together with a copy of the tape, to the interviewee for their verification. All participants agreed with the accuracy of the transcription and only one



participant asked for material (one sentence) to be removed, in this case, because they felt could identify them.

Polkinghorne (1995:13) distinguishes between two methods of analysis when using narrative interview data; 'the analysis of narratives' and 'narrative analysis'. The analysis of narratives uses narratives as data through which it is 'possible to access the world of the story teller, seeking to locate common themes or conceptual manifestations among the data'. In this approach the narrative data are the starting point, rather than the end point of the analysis. Narrative analysis, on the other hand, treats the stories as actually constituting the social reality of the narrator and so the analysis does not seek to find similarities and is not interested in conceptual themes. In keeping with the Grounded Theory approach that I have adopted in carrying out this research, I have chosen the former approach and attempted to analyse the narrative responses for the themes and concepts that they contain. I will explore the outcomes of this thematic analysis in more depth in the next chapter.

Having thought that the interviews would merely 'add colour' to the questionnaire responses, I was overwhelmed by the impact that they had on me and on my analysis. The interviews were truly dialogic and felt like an extension of the co-inquiry process. In each interview both the respondent and I shared knowledge and reflections and the process resulted in each respondent volunteering that it had enabled them to build on and develop their own thinking and reflections. Each interviewee commented at the end of the interview on how they had 'enjoyed' it, that they had had new reflections on their role and that they had identified something they were going to do as a result of talking to me.

*"It's been useful to reflect on the changes and it brings to mind for me the fact that I and my colleagues don't get any formal supervision. Talking to you now brings to my mind that I need that. I feel I've learnt something in the last few minutes and been able to reflect."* (PA108: m-ca 5+ i)

Etherington (2004:77) has also observed how this approach to 'reflexive interviewing' allows for deeper meanings to be explored through the unfolding communication between both parties. This style of interviewing, or what she calls 'reflexive conversation', encourages the emergence of 'reflexive knowledge' and enables both researchers and participants to 'co-construct meaning' (p.109). The opportunity to engage in such an exploration, around issues of role and identity was welcomed



enthusiastically by all the interviewees (and even by some of the questionnaire respondents) in my research, and this enthusiasm, verging on need, served to reinforce one of the emergent findings from the research.

The great majority of participants noted that the opportunity to engage in such a discursive reflection with peers and managers was not available at work and yet the recognition that such a strategy helped them to feel confident in their role led many of them to seek out such opportunities informally. I have not yet followed up the interviewees to know whether they continued their reflections after the interview, although most of them indicated in notes they sent when confirming accuracy of my transcriptions that they had done. For myself, I found the interview process a powerful experience that contributed to my own 'progressive focusing' (Stake, 1995:9) on the emergent themes. Furthermore I found the process of listening and re-listening to the taped interviews while typing up the narrative transcriptions further enhanced this progressive analysis.



## 5. Re- Presentations

In the previous chapter I discussed the methodological orientation behind the design of my research with the Connexions PAs. Ideally, research such as this, within a Grounded Theory framework, should be framed without the formation of preconceived ideas. However, as I have indicated, it is rarely feasible to adopt such a position and the best that we can aim for is a degree of 'conscious partiality' (Mies, 1993). In the previous chapter, therefore, I have gone to some lengths to make clear my own role and assumptions within this research. In this chapter I endeavour to represent the views of my research co-participants as honestly and fairly as I can. As Etherington (2004:83) has noted, however, the current 'crisis of representation' leaves us without the familiar structures for presenting our 'findings'. If there is no objective truth to be found, she suggests, then there can be no 'findings', only 're-presentations'.

It is not possible to present all the data from the questionnaires and the interviews in its entirety and I acknowledge the inevitability of my own subjectivity in selecting participants' words to illustrate the themes that emerged through my analysis. In selecting extracts to illustrate the emergent themes I have had to make choices, based on my own interpretations of what respondents were saying. In doing this I acknowledge that there will inevitably be some voices that have only been partially heard and there may be others that I have inadvertently ignored or avoided. Furthermore, my interpretations are interwoven with my iterative reflection on the literature. As I outlined in the previous chapter, the research process in which I have been engaged has not been straightforward or linear. The methodology that I have used has involved me in an iterative journey between data collection, reflection on literature and reflection on findings as my analysis has gradually developed out of the emergent themes.

In representing the 'voices' of my research participants I sought to preserve their anonymity and confidentiality, while still permitting a sense of 'who' was speaking. Respondents were coded and anonymised, and everyone involved was assured that any responses on the questionnaire or in an interview would be confidential, with neither participant nor their employer/organisation being identified in the analysis. As a



consequence, each direct quote that I have included in the remaining chapters is coded to identify the gender (*m/f*), professional/occupational background prior to Connexions (*sw* = social work; *yw* = youth work; *ca* = careers adviser; *ewo* = education welfare officer; *ed* = teacher), number of years in that previous role and whether the quoted extract is taken from a questionnaire (*q*) or an interview (*i*). So, for example (*PA37 f-sw 10+ i*) is a female interviewee who previously worked in a role as a social worker for more than 10 years.

### **Profile of Respondents**

The questionnaire was sent out in two 'batches'. The first batch in March 2004, and a second batch in August to pick up two cohorts completing their training in the summer. At this stage of the research there were no issues with choosing a sample, as I included all participants who had completed the training. For ethical reasons I did not include any participant who was still 'a student' – that is, anyone who had not yet successfully completed all the modules. Not only could such a request put an additional pressure on participants who had 'fallen behind' but I feared that the potential need to 'stay on my good side' could be construed as coercion. This gave me a population of 271 potential respondents, of whom 109 returned completed questionnaires. This represents a 40% response rate.

This is a predominantly female area of work and the gender distribution of respondents was representative of the total population:

Total population (n = 271): 77.2% were female  
22.8% were male

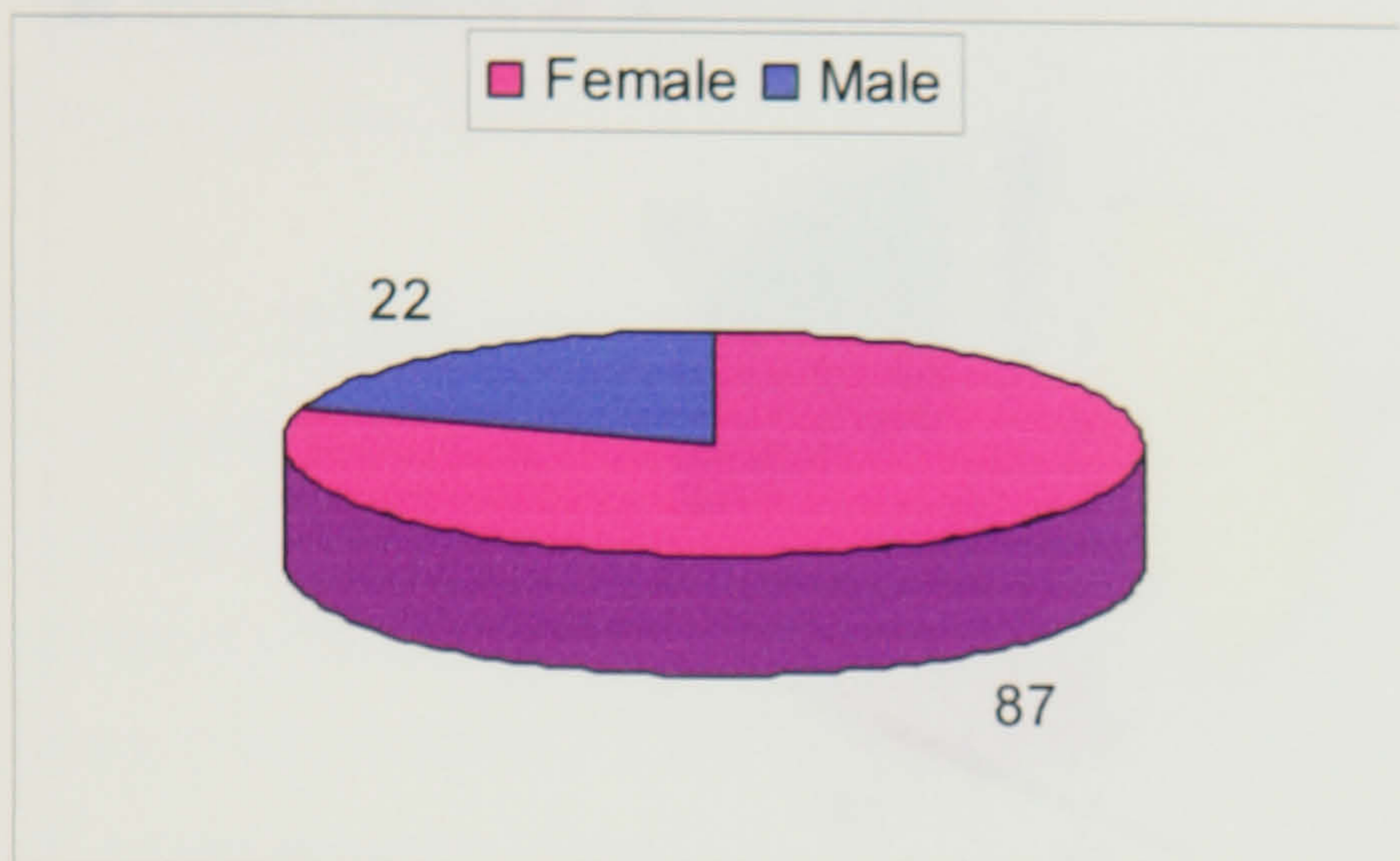
Respondents (n = 109): 79.8% were female  
20.1 % were male.

However, in analysing the questionnaire responses and in building the emergent themes I did not find any significant differences between the perceptions and attitudes of the male and female respondents. Nor did I find any significant gender differences within the interview data, in the reasons participants gave for entering this area of work or the factors that contributed to the development of their professional identity. Hence, I have not attempted to include gender issues in my interpretation and discussion. Interestingly, Hoggett (2005:8) also reported on the 'surprising' absence of gender as 'a



mediating factor' in the 'experience of role identity' amongst 'regeneration workers' and suggests that it could be attributable to the 'particularities' of their sample. This may also be the case with my sample, which is after all comprised mainly of women. However, there are other parallels between my own and Hoggett's findings as I will outline later in this chapter.

**Figure 2: Gender of Respondents to the Questionnaire (Q.1)**



The answers to question 4 on the questionnaire indicated that the respondents were also proportionately representative of the Connexions Partnership areas in the total population. Partnership area or delivery model of different Connexions partnerships has not formed part of the analysis. All that can be said is that the responses represent the views of PAs across the four partnership areas from which we drew our course participants.

**Figure 3: Questionnaire Respondents by Partnership Area (Q.4)**

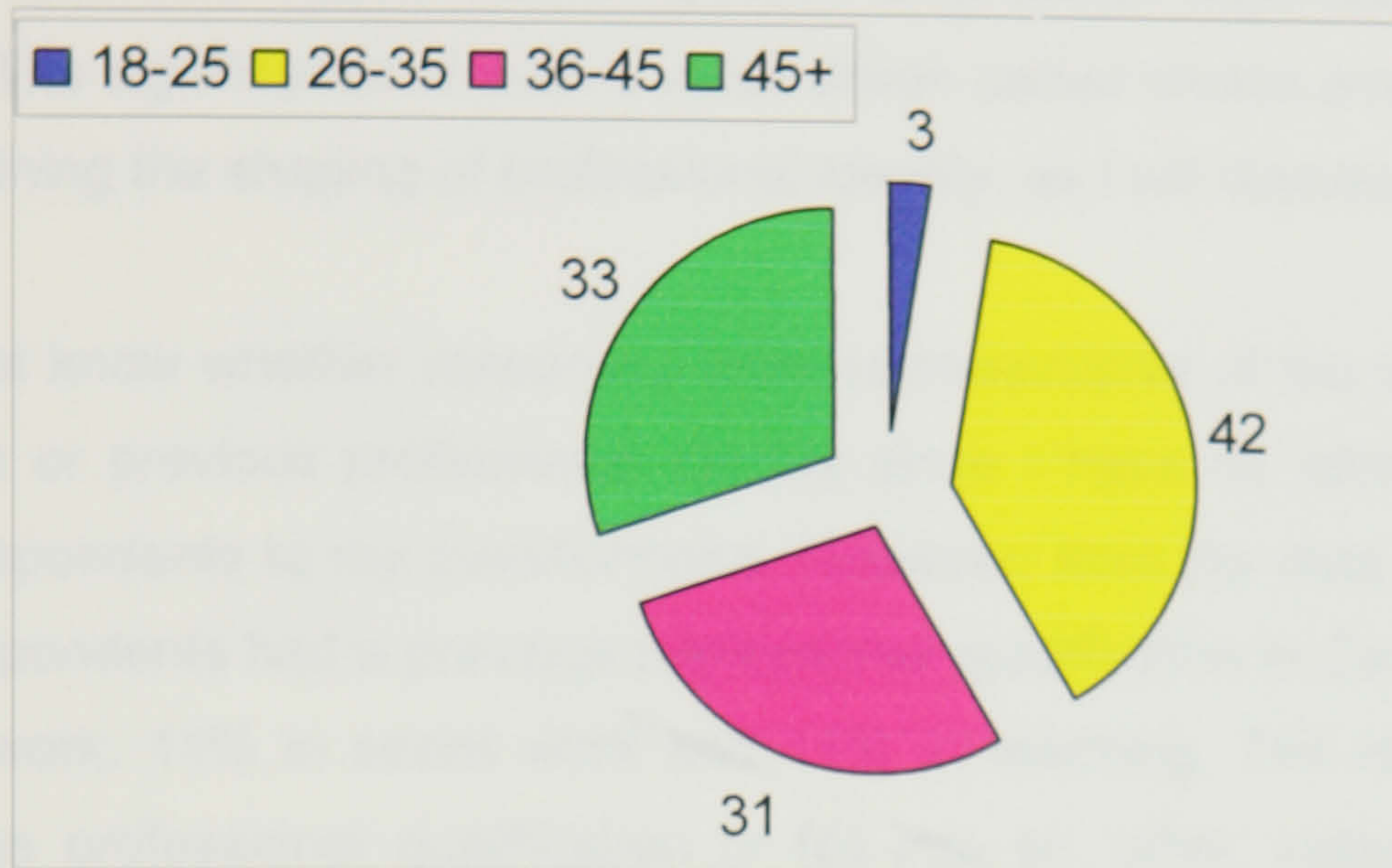
Partnership Area	Total Population (n=271)	Respondents (n=109)
a	47%	55%
b	23%	24%
c	22%	16%
d	8%	5%

The Connexions programmes are designed as post-qualifying courses. It was an entry requirement for the programme that participants held an existing qualification,



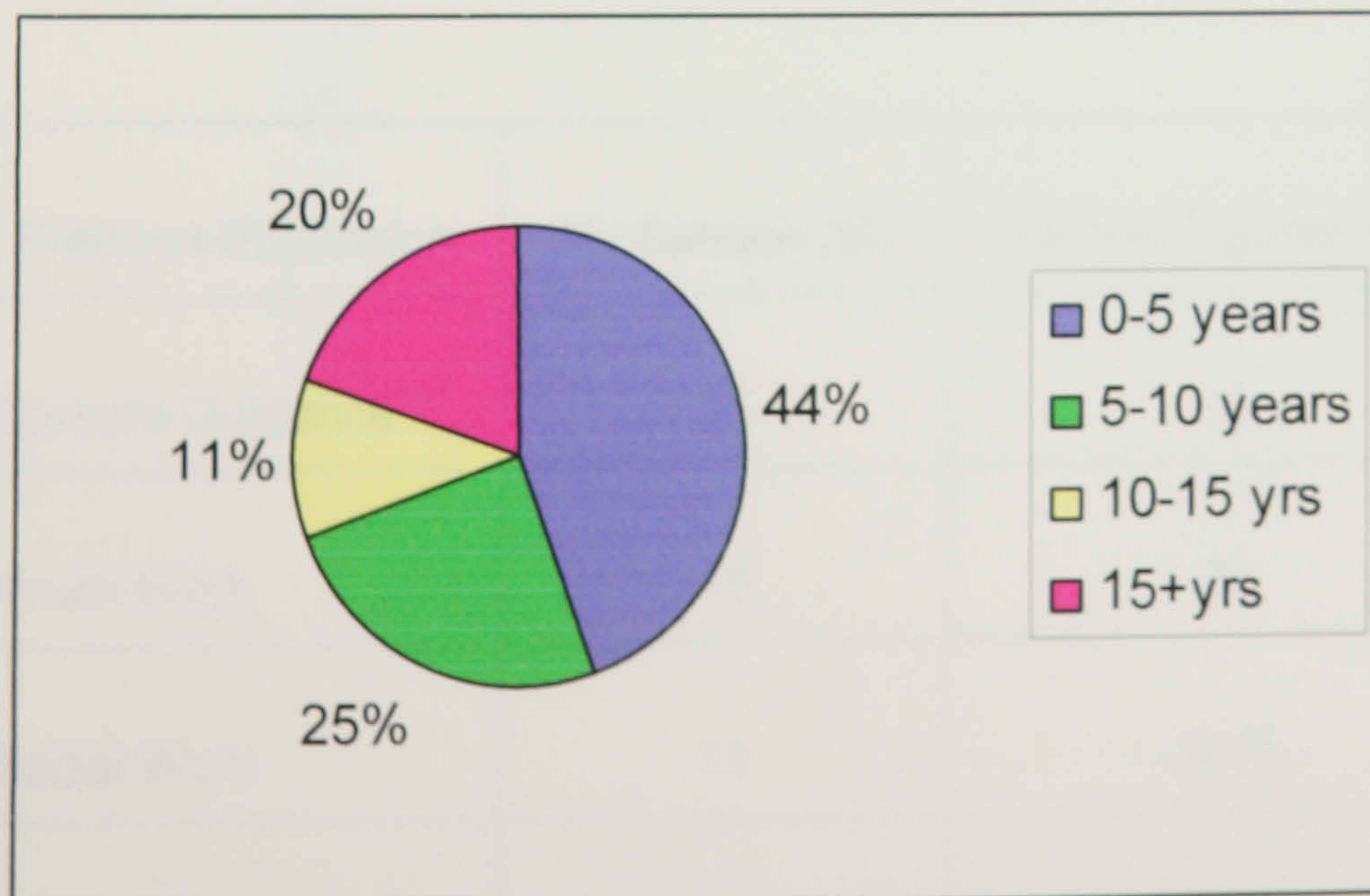
equivalent to NVQ level 4, in a 'relevant' profession. Hence, the majority of participants had already completed a higher education programme leading to a professional award. This could explain the age profile of the respondents, 97% of whom were over the age of 25 and 64% of whom over the age of 35.

**Figure 4: Questionnaire Respondents by Age (Q.2)**



Despite this age profile, 44% of the respondents reported that they had gained their previous (to Connexions) professional qualification within the past 5 years.

**Figure 5: Number of years since Respondents gained their previous professional qualification (Q.5)**



This could suggest that a number of respondents had entered their previous (to Connexions) professional training after the age of 35 and that professional work with young people had not, therefore, necessarily been a first career choice. This was not a



line of questioning that I had foreseen when I designed the questionnaire and there is, therefore, no questionnaire data on that issue. However, I did ask the interviewees about their previous professional backgrounds and it emerged through the interviews that 7 out of the 11 interviewees had initially chosen career or employment paths that were in no way connected with young people. In those 7 cases, the interviewees had moved into working with young people within the past 10 years due to the development of their personal values and a rejection of previous organisational and employment roles. The significance of such a value driven career choice emerged as a key factor in determining the shaping of professional identity, as I will discuss later.

I cannot know whether responses were representative of the total sample in terms of job title or previous professional identity since I have no information about this from non-respondents to my questionnaire. However, from my data I did know that 35% of the respondents had a previous professional qualification in Careers Guidance, 15% in youth work, 11% in social work and 11% in teaching. The remainder either had no previous professional qualification or fell into an 'other' category such as Business Administration, Housing Management or Counselling. When compared to available national figures (see Figure 6), the distribution within my sample can be seen as broadly representative of the distribution of participants on the national training programme.

**Figure 6: Previous professional backgrounds of Connexions PAs (Q.5)**

Previous Profession	My Sample (%)	National Figures (%) *
Careers Guidance	35	42
Youth Work	15	21
Social Work	11	6.74
Teaching	11	6.79
Other	28	23.47

\* source CfBT, (2005)



70% of the respondents gave their current job title as Personal Adviser or PAYP worker (Positive Activities for Young People – a PA role for those without a previous professional qualification), and 45% of respondents described their main place of work as in a school.

Figure 7: Current job title of Questionnaire Respondents (Q.3)

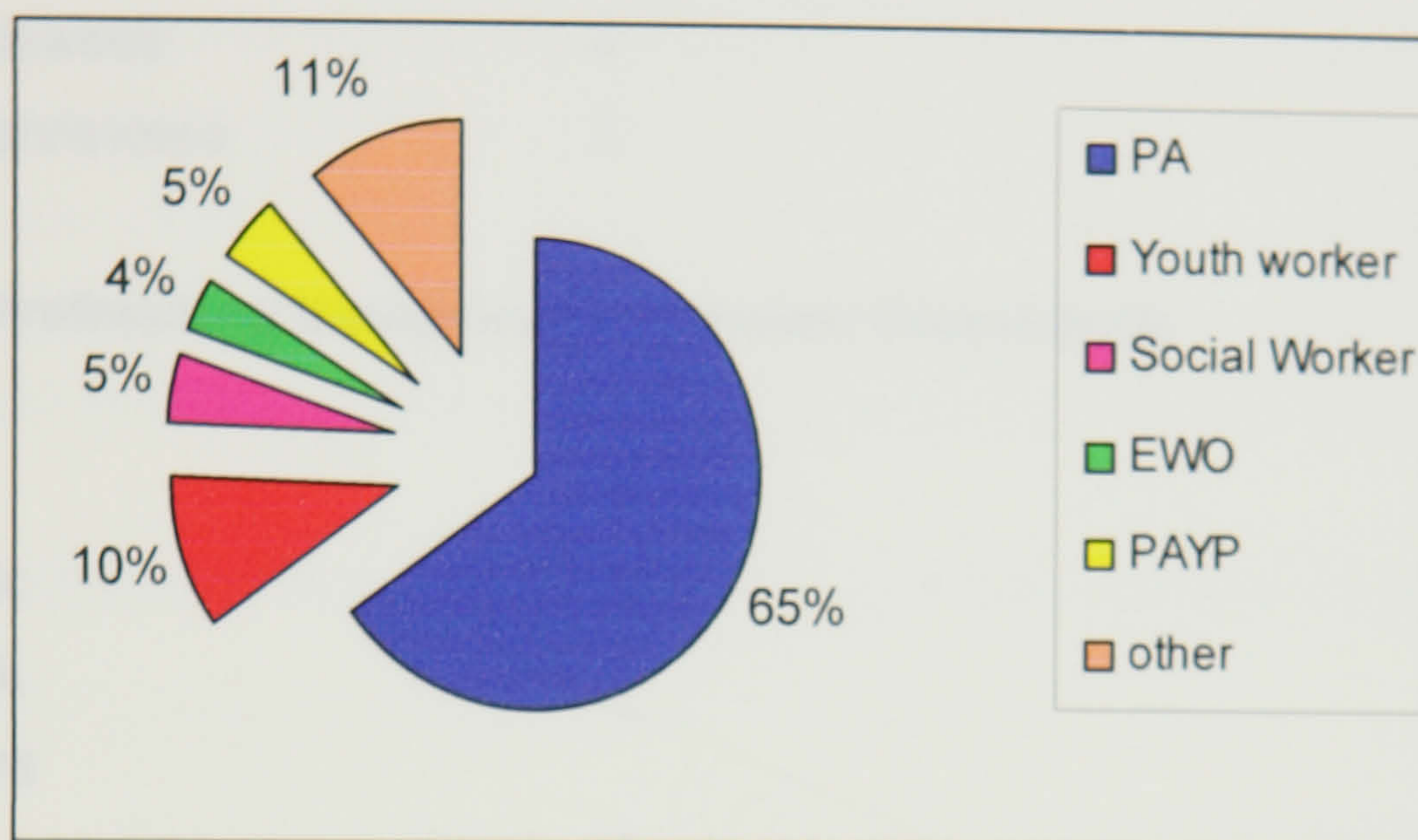
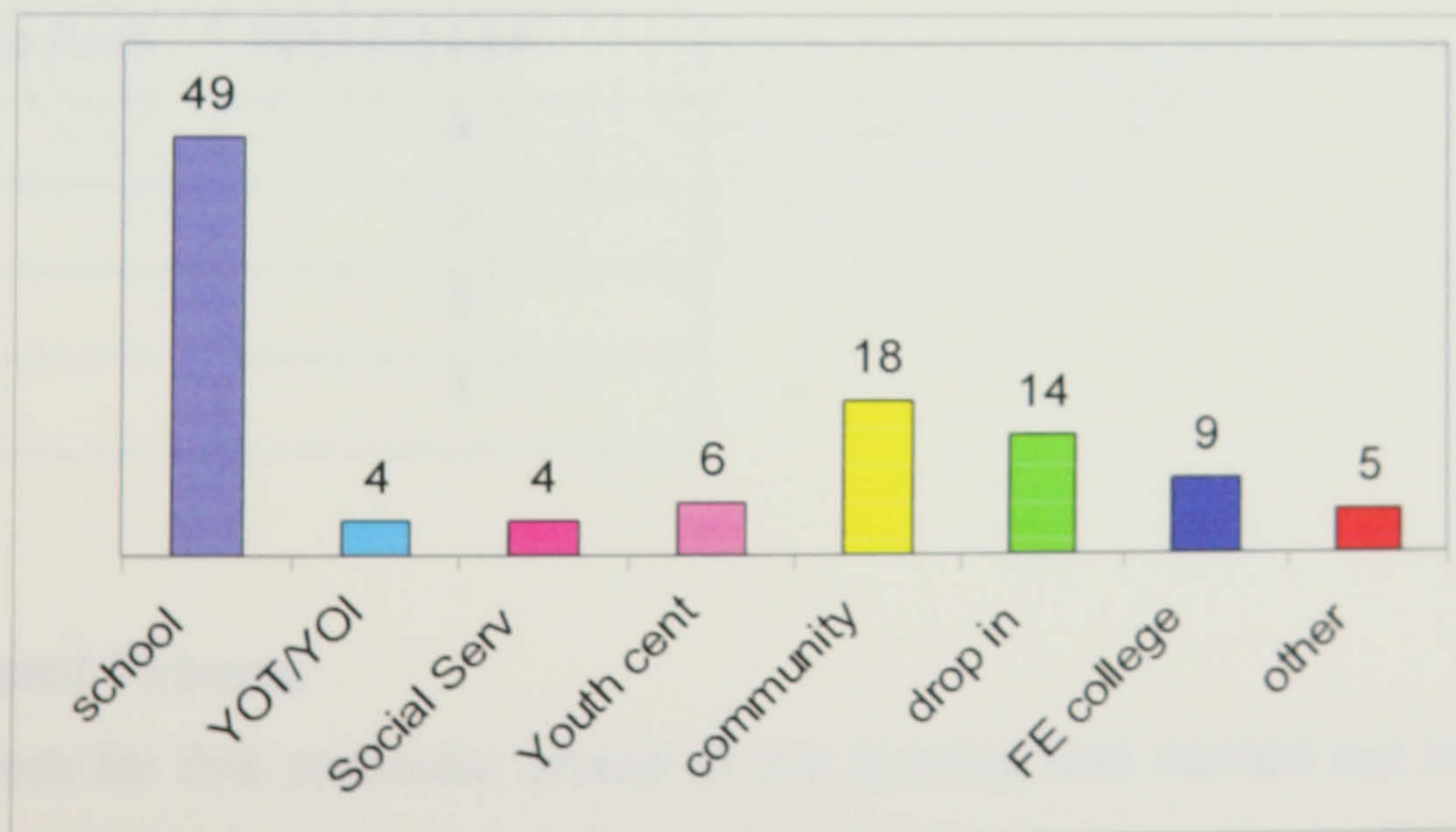


Figure 8: Questionnaire Respondents' Main Location of Work (Q.9)



As I have indicated in the previous chapter, my main criterion when selecting respondents for interview was the reflective, constructive and illuminative nature of their narrative responses on the questionnaire. However, I also strove to ensure that, as far as possible, this smaller sample was representative of the larger questionnaire sample in terms of gender, previous professional background and partnership area. I



was able to select 11 participants fitting these criteria from those who had given their consent to be interviewed.

**Figure 9: Gender of Interview Respondents**

Total number of interviewees	11
Male interviewees	4
Female interviewees	7

**Figure 10: Professional Background of Interview Respondents**

Careers	5
Youth Work	3
Social Work	1
Employment Service	2

**Figure 11: Partnership Area of Interview Respondents**

Partnership Area	Interviewees
a	4
b	3
c	3
d	1

### **The Emergent Themes**

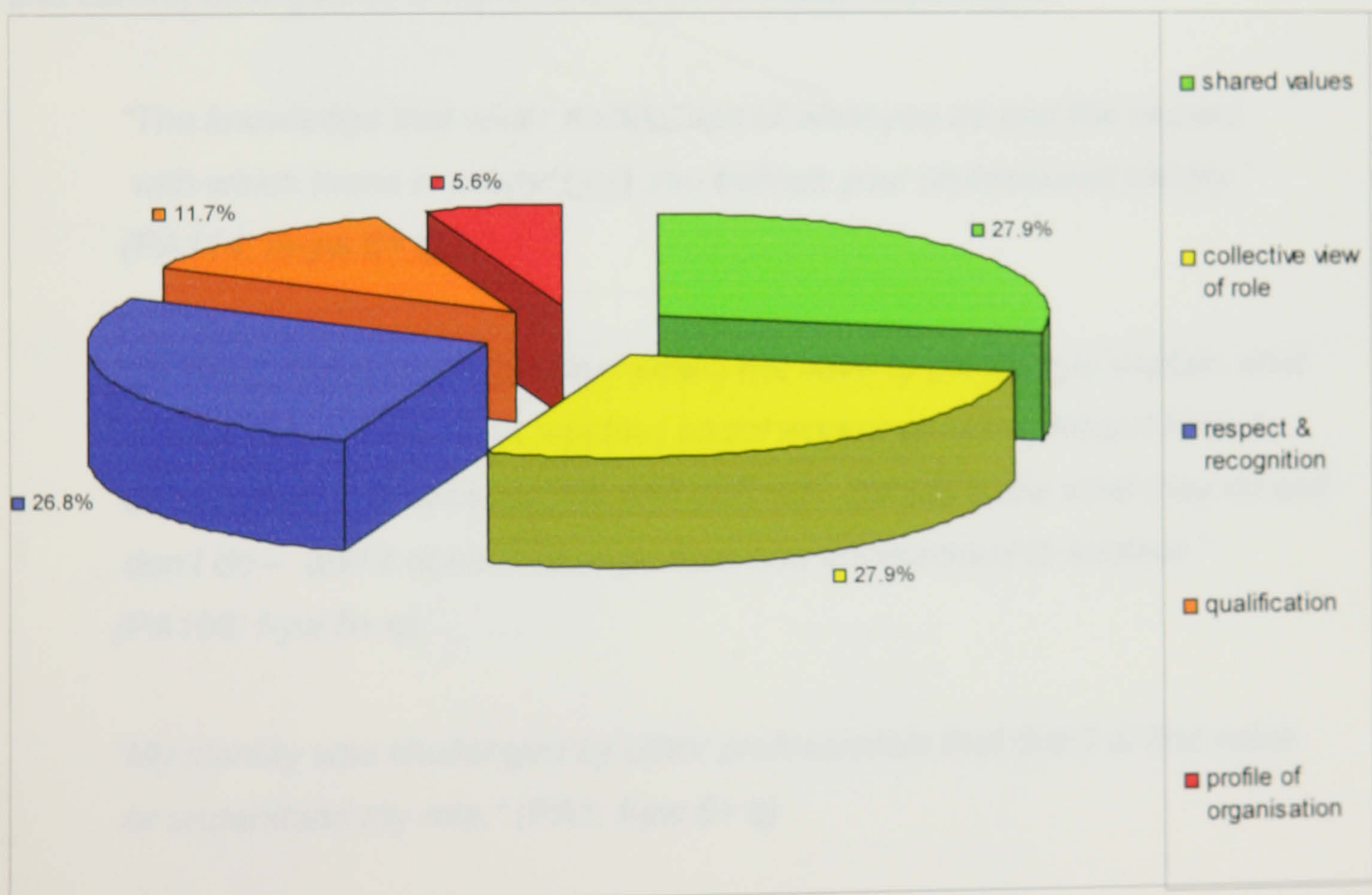
The field work for this particular phase of the journey was carried out in 2004, before the rumours about 'the future of Connexions' started circulating but after publication of 'Every Child Matters' (DfES, 2003a) which strengthened and reinforced government's commitment to the approach to delivery of services that the Connexions strategy had introduced. 'Every Child Matters' also introduced the concept of Children's Trusts and Lead Professional Role, but engagement and exploration of the possibilities and difficulties with these concepts had not really begun to take place within the local Connexions services at that time. That layer of complexity, therefore, is not



represented in the perceptions and responses of the Personal Advisers who took part in my research. Their responses are concerned solely with the experience of becoming a Personal Adviser following the introduction of Connexions.

As I outlined in the previous chapter, I engaged in a process of 'focused coding' (Charmaz, 2002:686) of the qualitative data from the questionnaires. This led to the emergence of five main themes that had significance in relation to the development of professional identity: the significance of shared professional values and approaches to working with young people; the importance of developing a collective view of their role among PAs; the significance of respect and recognition from 'others'; the importance placed on professional qualification and training; and the extent to which the organisation or service one worked within contributed to one's professional identity.

**Figure 12: Professional Identity: emergent themes from the questionnaires**



In representing these themes in the form of a pictorial chart (Figure 12), I am not offering a statistical representation of the data. The charts used throughout this chapter are intended to be illustrative and were formed by counting the number of times each theme occurred throughout the responses on the questionnaire. Inevitably, some respondents' answers are reflected in more than one category and each respondent, in answering all the questions, has been counted more than once. This representation,



however, helped me to develop a framework upon which to build my developing analysis as I re-engaged with the literature and with the interviews

### **Recognition and Identity**

Personal Advisers responding to the questionnaire experienced difficulties establishing an identity when working in a context where very few people recognised or understood their role and/or title. At the time when these data were collected, the role was still very new. Many PAs were still trying to understand for themselves what their role was and their confusion was exacerbated by the perception – and the experience in some cases – of disrespect from others with whom their work brought them into contact. Responses across all the questions indicated a very strong perception that, unless others were able to recognise and understand one's job title and role, it is very difficult to maintain a sense of having a professional 'identity'. The importance of recognition and respect from other professionals and from their service users (young people and their parents and carers) emerged as a significant issue for these respondents.

*"The knowledge that wider society has of what you do and the respect with which those in power treat you defines your professional identity."*

*(PA114: m-yw 5+ q)*

*"If I had a professional identity I would not have to continue to explain what a PA is or what we do. A teacher, social worker or nurse doesn't have to explain their role because it is well defined – people know what they do and don't do – and it doesn't change from one environment to another."*

*(PA103: f-yw 5+ q)*

*"My identity was challenged by other professionals that didn't at first value or understand my role." (PA1: f-yw 5+ q)*

*"People, particularly the general public, do not know what a 'Personal Adviser' is: I am forever explaining." (PA 108: m-ca 5+ q)*

*"I have had at least 2 other professionals challenge who I am when in a meeting about a young person. Also I have had other professionals quite openly say they have 'no time' for Connexions and actually be rude to me personally – I hate it!" (PA216: f-ca 5+ q)*



Questionnaire respondents referred to the 'struggle' they faced trying to explain and clarify their new role to others. This struggle was very often described in terms of causing a challenge to their feelings of self worth, 'professionalism' and identity. Analysis of the questionnaires revealed that while some 70% of the respondents gave their job title as Personal Adviser or PAYP worker (Figure 13), only 23% of respondents felt comfortable describing themselves as a PA to others (Figure 14).

Figure 13: Job Title of Respondents (Q. 3)

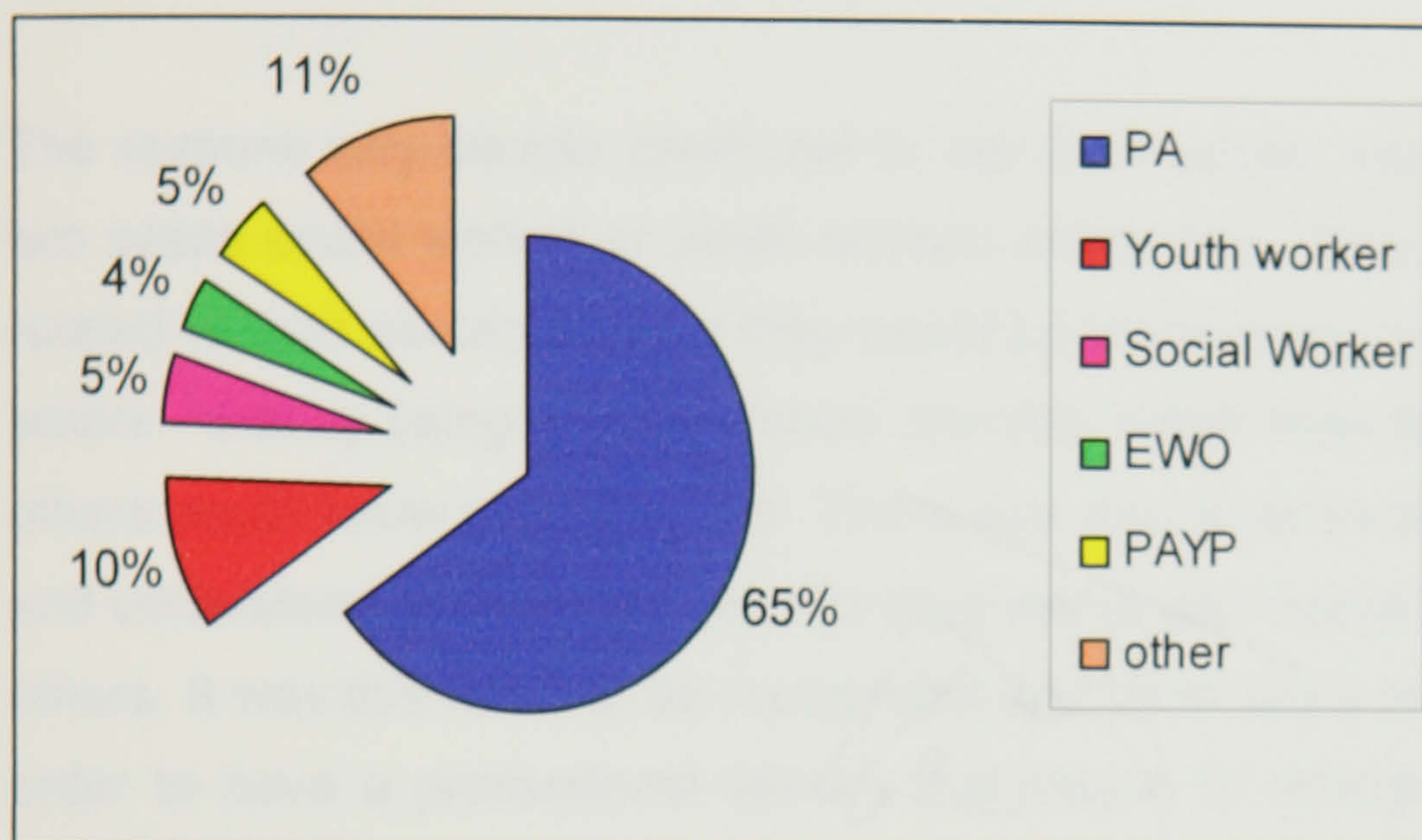
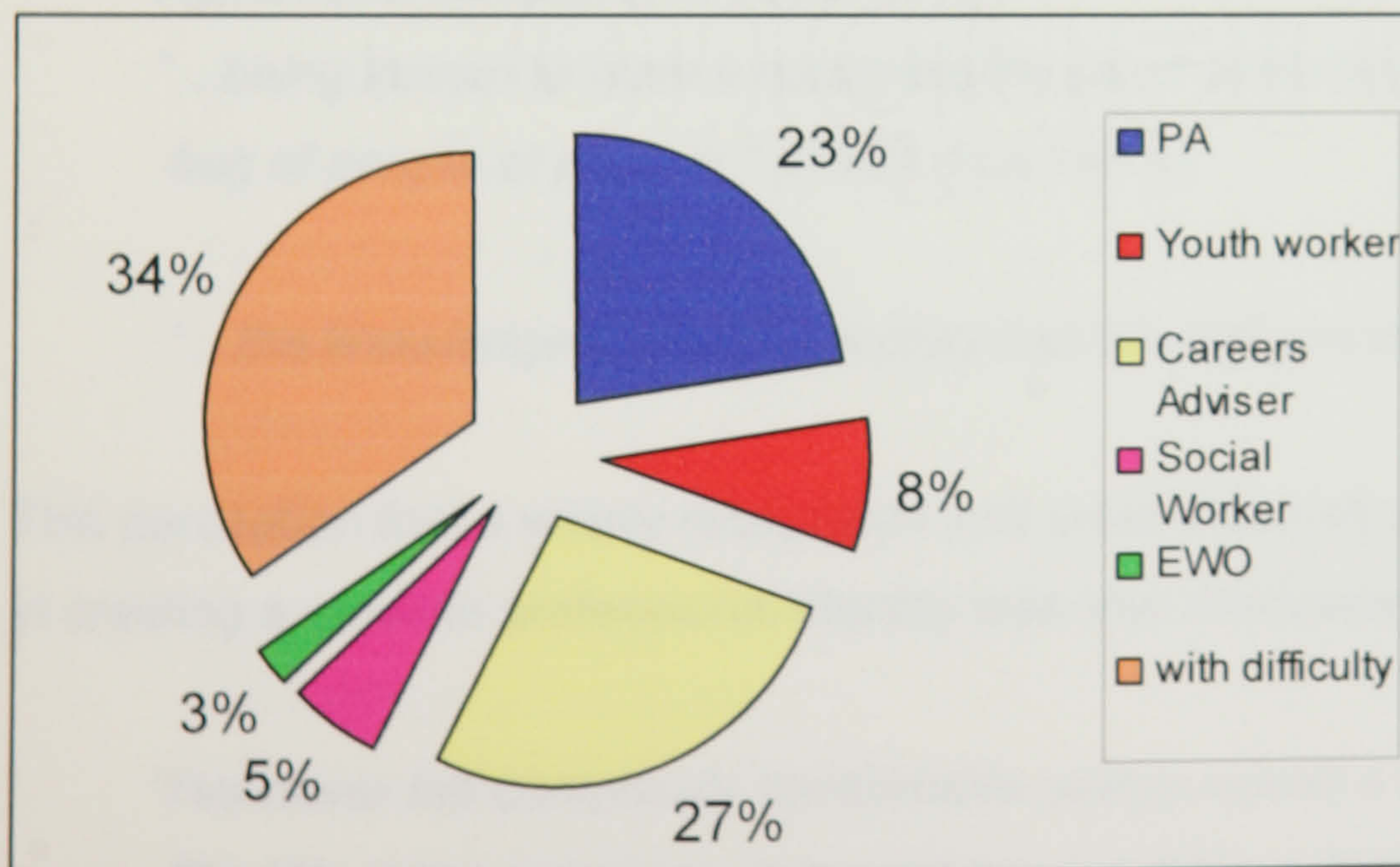


Figure 14: When you are asked what you do for a living, how do you respond? (Q. 29)



Not all respondents were working in the new role of PA. The questionnaire was sent to all those who had participated in the Diploma or Understanding Connexions training courses, but not all of these participants necessarily worked for Connexions or worked as PAs in other agencies. Some had come to the training course to learn about



Connexions and to explore how it aimed to work with their existing role and agency. Since, on the whole, their professional role remained intact it is not surprising that they were able to give the same answer to questions 3 and 29. Of those working as PAs however (n=77), approximately only 25% (n=19) felt comfortable describing themselves in that way to others. The rest continued to use their previous role title (predominantly 'careers adviser') or described themselves as having difficulty telling other people what their job was. Of those who felt comfortable calling themselves 'PA', 11 were former careers advisers, 4 were former youth workers, 3 had worked in education and 1 was a former social worker.

The reasons why people continued to call themselves 'careers adviser' (or in one or two cases social worker or youth worker) rather than Personal Adviser seemed to be related to their perception that they would be more easily understood and accepted by others - that by using an established role title, rather than the label 'Personal Adviser', others would know what they 'do'. There was also a sense that by using a recognisable and understood professional job title they would gain respect and status in the eyes of others. It was this need to be recognised and have one's role understood by others in order to have a professional identity that began to emerge as a strong theme from questionnaires.

*A professional identity is acquired by:*

*"...being known to have a recognisable set of skills and knowledge. We are a rag bag of people at present." (PA95: f-ca 15+ q)*

*"...the knowledge that wider society has of what you do." (PA114: m-yw 5+ q)*

This perception that a widely recognised and understood job label or title was important in creating a credible professional identity was also expressed by some interviewees

*"I've never felt completely comfortable calling myself a Personal Adviser.*

*The title is too nebulous. It doesn't say anything. I don't think I ever introduce myself as a Personal Adviser." (PA197: m-ca 10+ i)*

*"I won't use the word Personal Adviser – I don't see 'Personal Adviser' as a profession. The title means absolutely nothing to anyone. If you call yourself a careers adviser, people are in no doubt about what you do." (PA138: f-ca 5+ i)*



While there was undoubtedly a very strong theme of erosion of status and with it almost a sense of shame and embarrassment with the new role title, some respondents attempted to rationalise these emotions by exploring the impact it had on their practice. These responses tended to reinforce the perception that identity and title were strongly related, but tended to express this more in terms of the way in which the expectations of others shaped the way one carried out one's role. PAs believed that this lack of clarity about their role tended to impact on the way they were able to work with young people through the inappropriate referrals and requests they received.

*"Job title is immaterial – being called a PA doesn't affect how I see my professional identity – but it is important in terms of users of the service – none of our service users know if they are speaking to a qualified careers adviser or not. I feel I am prevented from doing what I was trained to do."*  
(PA189: f-ca 10+ q)

*"I find it difficult at the school to fulfil what I see as my role – they resist and put up barriers which prevent me from doing much of the work I feel I should be doing."* (PA103: f-yw 5+ q)

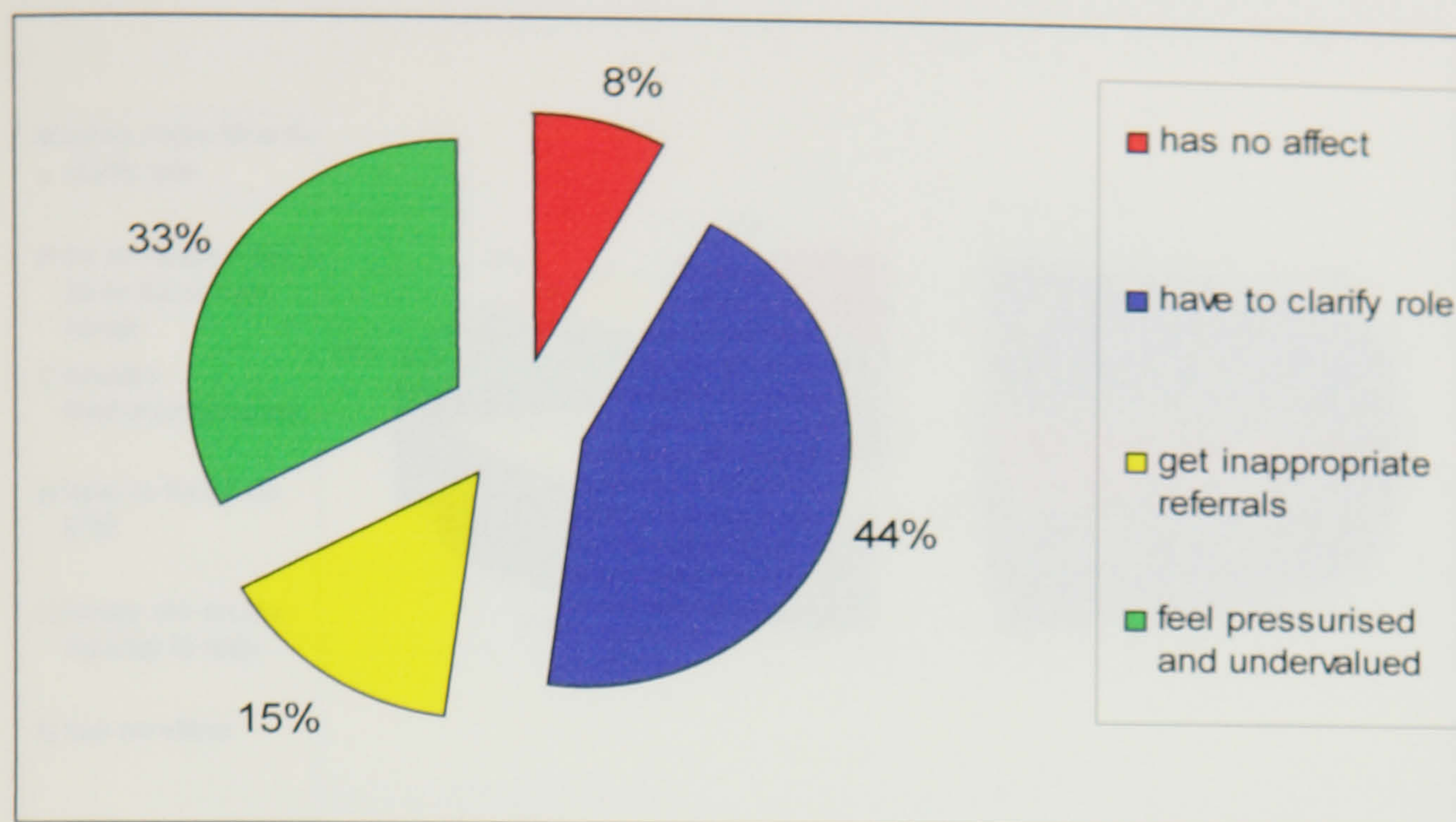
*"I often get inappropriate referrals. I constantly have to explain my changing role to them and try to help them make sense of Connexions' unclear role and purpose."* (PA28: f-sw 5+ q)

*"When I ask (young people) what their understanding of the meeting is when they arrive, they usually say they've come for a careers interview. This is often the way teachers explain it to them."* (PA132: f-ca 5+ q)

*"I always ask (the young people) what their expectations are – those who are referred are often less clear about their expectations than those who self refer."* (PA144: f-ca 5+ q)



Figure 15: In what ways do the expectations of other professionals affect the way that you work with them? (Q.17)



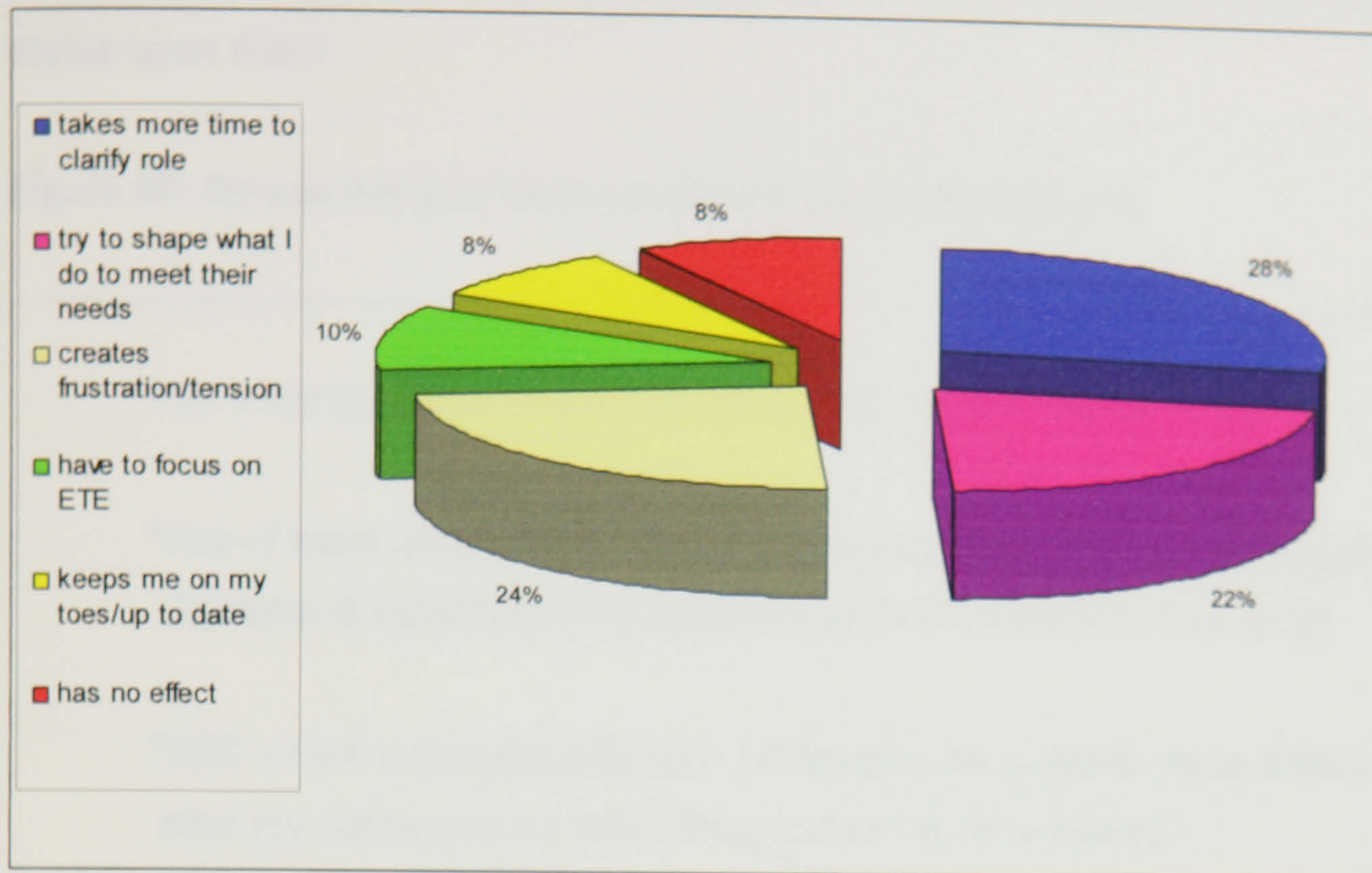
When working and interacting with young people, however, it emerged that respondents generally felt comfortable in their role, regardless of what they were called. Although there was still resistance to, and discomfort about, introducing themselves as a Personal Adviser, and while they often had to spend more time explaining what they could offer, on the whole respondents did not seem to feel the same need to have a 'labelled' or recognised professional identity when working with young people. In fact in several cases the view was expressed that some role ambiguity was helpful in enabling young people to work with them without stigma.

*"If they have an introduction and they understand about confidentiality and that you are prepared to talk to them about anything then that's probably all they bother about."* (PA111: f-ca 5+ q)

*"I would prefer a professional identity that was capable of conveying more understanding to people in general. However, keeping it more general can have its advantages for young people who may feel less stigmatised coming forward to a wide umbrella type professional."*  
(PA225: f-ca 5+ q)



Figure 16: In what ways do young people's expectations of you affect the way that you work with them? (Q.13)



I find this discrepancy interesting, because it tends to suggest that a sense of a 'recognisable' identity is important only in terms of differentiating one's role from that of other 'professionals'. Emerging from the questionnaires was a perception that because 'others' did not understand or recognise their role, it was hard for PAs to find their place within the inter-professional contexts in which they were expected to work. This point of view was elaborated on by one interviewee, who explained that it was the inter-professional nature of the role and the inter-agency context of the work that made it important for others to understand what each professional's contribution could be.

*"It's important that other professionals understand your professional identity because you're not working in isolation – you're linking in with all these other organisations – they need to see where you fit in. They're coming from a different angle than the young person."* (PA225: f-ca 5+ i)

### **The Significance of Training and Qualification on professional identity**

There were references in the questionnaire responses to the significance of both initial and ongoing professional training to the creation and maintenance of a professional identity. Again, the importance of 'recognition' was raised by several respondents who expressed the view that because they had undergone extended study towards a



'recognised' professional qualification, this bestowed upon them an identity that could be understood by others. This appeared to support Eraut's (1998) assertion that, for professionals, 'qualification is in every sense a rite of passage, which confers social status upon them'.

**Figure 17: Do you feel you have a professional identity? (Q. 31)**

*"Yes – my qualifications entitle me to this." (PA71: m-yw 5+ q)*

*"Yes - I have undertaken training as a postgraduate for a year to get the Diploma & Qualification in careers guidance." (PA111: f-ca 5+ q)*

*"YES – I am a careers adviser – I belong to an institute, have letters after my name and my position requires this at pre-entry."  
(PA155: m-ca 5+ q)*

*"I feel that careers adviser is my identity as this is what I am trained for & also people understand what that is." (PA260: f-ca 15+ q)*

*"I see social workers as having professional identity because of the extra training/qualifications." (PA208: f-sw 5+ q)*

*"I currently do not feel that I have a professional identity. I am required to be a 'jack of all trades' and by implication a 'master of none'. I find it demeaning that someone with my professional qualifications is not regarded as fully qualified within the Connexions framework until I undertake the Diploma training – a quasi 'qualification' designed to indoctrinate not educate. Meanwhile the company continues to recruit well meaning amateurs with NVQ 3s - and to the clients there is no distinction between them and me." (PA138: f-ca 5+ q)*



**Figure 18: What are the main factors affecting how a professional identity is acquired or changed? (Q35)**

*"A set of common criteria which identify the work that the professional is supposed to do within a clearly defined code of conduct and relating to a specialist body of knowledge that requires accreditation."*

*(PA267: m-ed 5+ q)*

*"In my view a 'professional identity' is acquired through a high level of postgraduate training combined with putting into practice the highly specialised knowledge that has been gained."* (PA153: f-ca 10+ q)

This latter point about having the opportunity to develop and practice 'professional skills and knowledge' emerged as an important theme. For many, particularly the careers advisers, the lack of opportunity to 'use their professional skills' was linked to an erosion of their professional identity. Not only did they feel unable to use the skills they felt they had been trained and qualified to use, but they were being required to carry out a role that they felt untrained for. They felt like unskilled novices again.

*"I am unhappy that I no longer do much of the work I have trained for and have expertise in. I feel my role is very fudged now & I am often dealing with issues for which I have not been properly trained."*

*(PA260: f-ca 15+ q)*

*"I feel undervalued as my professional careers qualifications are not recognised. I feel that as a qualified careers adviser I can contribute to the Connexions Agenda but any expertise and skills I have developed and achieved are not recognised."* (PA204: f-ca 15+ q)

As I noted in chapter 3, a number of theorists have linked the process of identity building with a sense of 'competence', or the feeling that you are 'good at doing or being something' (Thomson et al., 2004:xv). It has been observed elsewhere that the creation of new roles can 'generate discomfort, anxiety and anger' for workers until they regain a sense of their competence in their role (Frost et al., 2005:188). Dreyfus



and Dreyfus (1986) have suggested that developing professionals progress through levels of 'competence', 'proficiency' and 'expertise' before they feel able to act intuitively. Applying such an analysis to the way in which PAs described their capabilities in role suggests that, whereas in their previous role they had mostly felt able to perform intuitively, in this new role they felt as though they had lost all that confidence and were being forced to learn the rules all over again.

Eraut (2004a) has described this as a 'transition period' when practitioners are not only expected to learn new practices but also to unlearn old ones. During such a transition period, he argues, practitioners cannot rely on their intuitive practice or tacit knowledge and will find their performance level reduced.

'The result is disorientation, exhaustion and vulnerability. The practitioners have become novices again without having the excuse of being a novice to justify a level of performance that fails to meet even their own expectations.' (Eraut, 2004:114)

This can help to explain some of their responses about loss of 'status' and 'respect' in the eyes of 'others' and the feeling that their identity had been 'stripped' from them.

I pursued this theme with participants in the interviews. PA interviewees made a link between their sense of threat to their professional identity and the feeling that their professional 'expertise' and 'competence' was being eroded. This erosion was happening, they felt, because there was not the same opportunity, within Connexions, to use their 'specialist' skills and knowledge. At the same time they felt that they were being required to take on dimensions of a new role in which they felt unskilled, under-qualified and unsure of the professional boundaries. In many cases, being thrown into a new and unfamiliar role raised participants' awareness of the gaps in their professional knowledge and competence. For many, the disorientation and vulnerability they were experiencing was compounded by a perceived lack of appropriate managerial support and development. They expressed the belief that they could not continue to be safe and effective practitioners unless they continued to explore practice dilemmas and continued to develop their professional competences.



*"We're not getting the opportunity to practise proper guidance interviews with a wide range of clients – so you tend to forget. Also we don't get any training on careers. We get loads of training on other things but none on careers, so you just don't keep up to scratch. It really does undermine people's confidence, because they realise they can't do the things they used to be able to do." (PA138: f-ca 5+ i)*

*"Since I trained in 1974 I have never had a refresher course in Guidance and so you get stuck into your own way of practicing and sometimes that needs to be shaken up a bit". (PA204: f-ca 15+ i)*

*"I feel a bit de-skilled now that I'm doing more intensive stuff. I don't do so much post-16 stuff and I'm a little more nervous when I have to do it. You have to really keep up with that all the time to know what you're talking about." (PA111: f-ca 5+ i)*

*"It feels here as though there is a real lack of respect of where we've come from and what we've brought. For me there is also a sense of loss – for the skills I've lost – because they haven't been able to acknowledge that we have them. At xxx I was always given the opportunity to grow as a professional – to develop – whereas here I feel unvalued and un-respected." (PA37: f-sw 10+ i)*

*"The xxx service was really good at developing you as a person. They were concerned as much about staff growth and development as they were young people's. My supervisor used to challenge me to try new things even when I didn't want to. It's challenging and you have to make an effort to move out of your comfort zone. We tell young people this so we should do it ourselves as well." (PA192: f-yw 10+ i)*

### **Collective role clarity and Identity**

As I have noted in chapter 2 there were substantial contradictions and confusions surrounding the introduction of Connexions and the role of PA. Furthermore, at the time these data were collected, the role of the PA was in its infancy. As Hoggarth and Smith (2004:49) have pointed out, given the different ways Connexions had been described



in policy statements it is hardly surprising if PAs, and others with whom they work had several different understandings of the role. These different understandings of the PA role tended to 'materialise in different titles and patterns of delivery, with different terms abounding' (Hoggarth and Smith, 2004:49). Many PAs in my research described feeling as though they were 'being left to make it up as they go along' and that this in turn was leading to the emergence of different models of the PA role, thus hindering the building of a recognisable collective identity.

*"Everyone's role is so different – a PA in one setting will do a completely different job to one in a different setting." (PA28: f-sw 5+ q)*

*"Because the PA role is interpreted differently within the Cxs service there is no chance of anyone outside it understanding it." (PA189: f-ca 10+ q)*

*"The service is very fragmented and unorganised. Other workers and myself feel very vulnerable." (PA161: f-yw 5+ q)*

*"We have been forced into this woolly role, which no one – least of all the professionals doing the job – understands." (PA144: f-ca 5+ q)*

*"I feel unhappy that unclear job/roles/descriptions and inconsistencies in what we do in our various settings has made us look like we don't know who we are or what we do. We need to decide who we are and what exactly we can/cannot do. It challenged my identity when someone said, 'Well so and so is a PA and does (whatever) so why don't you?'" (PA103: f-yw 5+ q)*

The view was often expressed that recognition and feeling valued as a professional could more easily be achieved if there were to be a greater 'shared understanding' of what the role is or could be. And yet this sense of confusion and isolation was frequently compounded by a lack of clear guidance, leadership or support from either managers or politicians.

*"I feel I carry out my work with a lack of support from management" (PA51: f-ca 5+ q)*



*"Connexions has given me a wider role which I don't feel comfortable with. Some of my managers have little understanding of what I do and I feel undervalued by my employing organisation."* (PA182: f-ca -5 q).

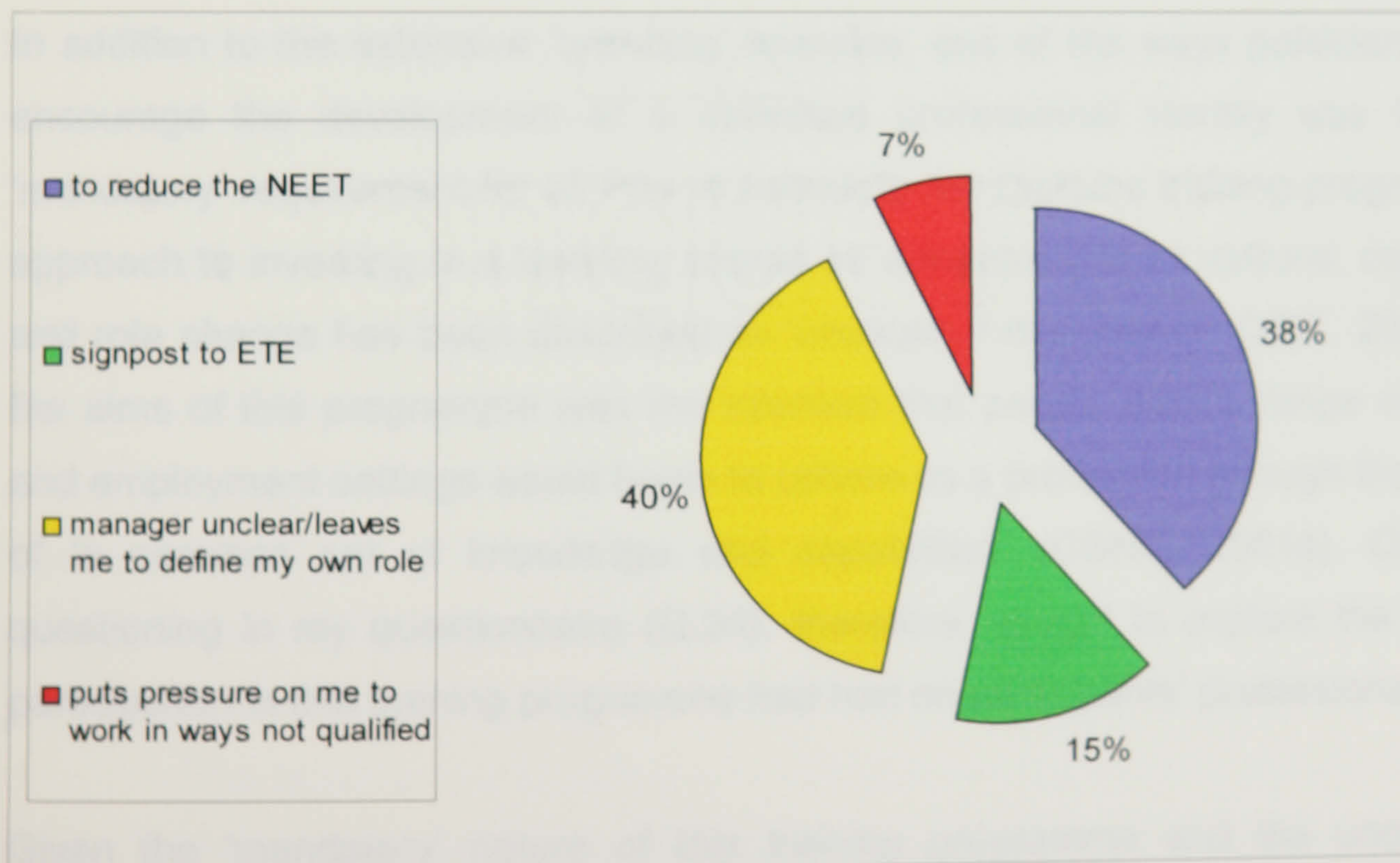
*"I feel my manager is less certain than I am about my role."*  
(PA71:m-yw 5+ q)

*"My manager is unable to define my role."* (PA161: f-yw 5+ q)

*"I have had 3 managers in 18 months – none of them have understood my role."* (PA266: f-sw -5 q)

*"My manager has let me carve out my own role. She doesn't know much about what I do."* (PA28: f-sw 5+ q)

**Figure 19: What is your perception of how your manager defines your role? (Q.20)**



This sense of isolation and confusion in role was increased in many cases by a perception that government was attempting to create a collective or corporate identity through the national marketing campaign – what Coles (2003) has rather aptly termed 'an outbreak in purple and orange'. Respondents found this branding to have been



unhelpful and did not feel that it had created an image of their role that they felt able to identify with or deliver.

*"I think the planning stage was handled badly and that Connexions spent too much time concentrating on promoting the brand without investing time on how that brand's values were going to be delivered." (PA28: f-sw 5+ q)*

*"Connexions marketed personal advisers as people who can fix all problems – at least that is how it is understood." (PA70: f-ca 5+ q)*

*"In some ways the 'expectation' created by the promotion of Connexions created a sense that it was going to be fundamentally different to other services. This means that some professionals expect more than the capacity of the service can deliver." (PA267 m-ed 5+ q)*

*"Connexions as a service has some identity because of marketing & I have some unease about being identified with it." (PA29: m-ca 10+ q)*

In addition to the extensive 'branding' exercise, one of the ways politicians sought to encourage the development of a collective professional identity was through the 'mandatory' requirement for all PAs to complete the Diploma training programme. This approach to investing in a learning course as a mechanism for cultural, organisational and role change has been described as 'unusual, if not unique' (CfBT, 2005). Among the aims of this programme was the intention that people from a range of disciplines and employment settings would begin to cohere as a profession through the acquisition of 'a common set of knowledge and capabilities' (CSNU, 2001a). One area of questioning in my questionnaire (Q.34), therefore, sought to explore the impact that participation in this training programme had had on participants' professional identity.

Given the 'mandatory' nature of this training programme and the understandable perception amongst many that they were being 'forced' to retrain into a new professional role that was not of their choosing, there were some emotional and mixed responses to this question. A small number of respondents replied, 'None'. Others indicated that they experienced the training programme as in some way 'insulting' or 'patronising' because they felt they had already trained to a high level of professional competency in their initial training and had developed considerable expertise and experience.



*"It knocked my confidence in myself." (PA260: f-ca 15+ q)*

*"Doing the Diploma helped me to understand the framework I am asked to work in. The impact was to undermine my professional identity "*  
*(PA29: m-ca 10+ q)*

Many of the responses to this question also reinforced the view that lack of leadership or understanding of their role by managers was inhibiting their ability to develop a collective identity.

*"It reinforced impression I had of role but that's different to what's expected of me." (PA41: f-sw 5+ q)*

*"It made me more aware of what I should actually be doing and what my professional identity should be – and acutely aware that the service is not really operating in the way it had set out to." (PA103: f-yw 5+ q)*

*"Made it clearer – but bigger. Also made me negative due to the reality of the situation." (PA107: m-ca 5+ q)*

*"Diploma was amazing to understand the role of a PA but led to disillusionment as the knowledge gap between manager & other agencies and myself grew." (PA266: f-sw -5 q)*

For some participants, however, the training programme did contribute to the building of a clarity and confidence in their role.

*"The diploma had an effect as it gave me an identity as to what a Connexions PA is all about and how it can help young people." (PA75: m-ca 5+ q)*

*"I think it gave me more of an understanding of other agencies and their roles/duties and I feel more confident of my professional role to challenge or question them." (PA76: f-ca 5+ q)*

*"Much more confident in what I am trying to do & more respect for what Connexions is trying to do." (PA208: f-sw 5+ q)*



One of the main ways that this confidence and sense of identity was enabled to emerge on the training programme was through the opportunity to meet with peers and explore the role and the work collectively in a supportive group. Indeed, it would appear that for many participants the most important outcome of the training programme had been the opportunity to explore practice issues and dilemmas together. Significantly most PAs claimed that such opportunities were rarely available within the day to day work environment in Connexions.

*"I gained peer support." (PA36: f-ca 5+ q)*

*"Allowed opportunity to spend time with other PAs and debate – which rarely happens otherwise." (PA39: f-ca 5+ q)*

*"Helped with opportunity to talk to other PAs in similar role - put some of role in context." (PA97: f-ca 5+ q)*

*"Widened my perception of my role as I met youth workers and social workers." (PA111: f-ca 5+ q)*

*"There is little opportunity for sharing professional knowledge like that within the organisation." (PA93: f-ed 15+ q)*

In the questionnaire responses, PAs linked their sense of confusion with their sense of isolation and the sense that their managers were not able to give them the support and guidance they needed. They also recognised that the way their work was organised, with them being mostly isolated in individual schools, meant that there were no opportunities to discuss and explore practice issues together. This theme was also raised in the interviews.

*"Because we're all isolated from each other, we've just kept on working the way we were before and with the same networks we used before. Maybe if we worked more as a team and developed our Connexions identity a bit more, that would be better. I don't feel we have a strong team identity. We're all based in different schools. We don't have opportunities to share practice issues." (PA103: f-yw 5+ i)*



As I have noted, 'isolation', 'lack of collectivity', and 'everyone developing the role differently' emerged as strong themes when PAs described their confusion with their role. My involvement with the PAs, through the Diploma training programme, had already afforded me insight into their experience of isolation and fragmentation. I was also already aware of how they valued the opportunity to come together and discuss their role with colleagues. The opportunity to explore their new role together seemed to help them develop an understanding of who and what they were and what they could be in the future. Questions 24-28 in the questionnaire (Figure 20), therefore, aimed to explore the extent to which they were able to continue this practice having completed the course. The majority (90%) of respondents said that they felt they had a small group of colleagues with whom they could talk about their work in a way that felt supportive.

**Figure 20: Questionnaire questions 24-28**

24. Do you feel that you have a group of colleagues with whom you can talk about your work <u>and</u> who will understand what you are talking about?
25. If YES, how big would you say this group was?
26. Are there any defining characteristics to this group that you can identify? What is it about this group that enables you to feel comfortable talking about your work with them?
27. Beyond this group, to what extent do you feel that you can talk about your work and be understood?
28. Can you think of any reasons for this?

Responses indicated that PAs were seeking out and building networks with colleagues 'who understand what I'm talking about' and who face similar challenges in their day to day work. Having day to day contact with these colleagues was less important, indicating that their networks were not necessarily based on convenience. Furthermore, while some responses indicated that similar professional background was a factor in their choice, a greater number were networking across professional



boundaries. For them the shared experience of the challenges of the new role was more important.

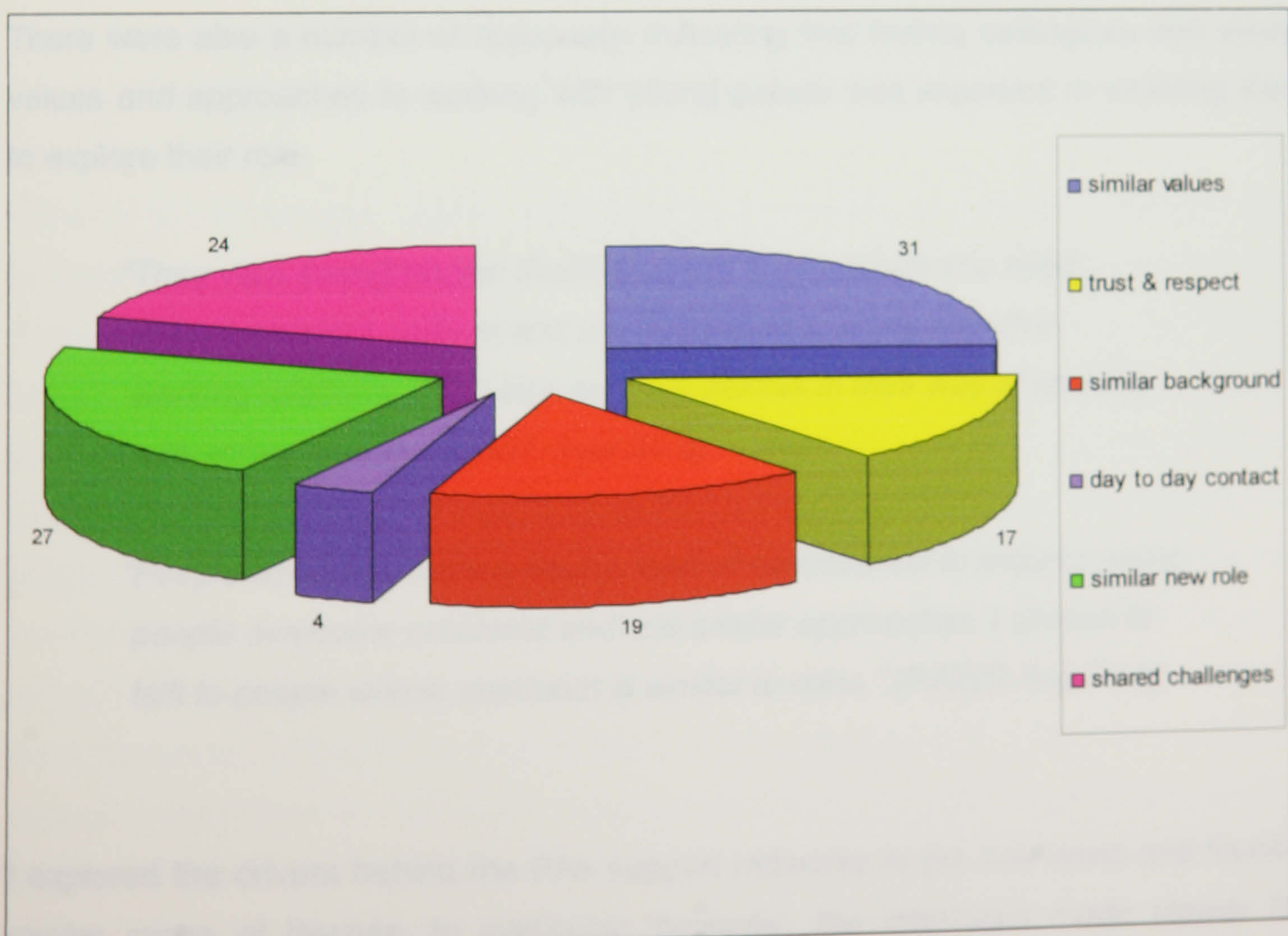
*"The unity of the often confusing role brings you to a mutual understanding."  
(PA97: f-ca 5+ q)*

*"Similar frustrations. Unfamiliarity with the context they are working in.  
Hope that Connexions can succeed. Unbelieving about the poor  
management and supervision."  
(PA95: f-ca 10+ q)*

*"They are able to empathise when I discuss problems I am experiencing."  
(PA121: f-ca 5 q)*

*"Don't feel I'll be judged/viewed as incompetent. We share similar concerns  
anxieties about our work."  
(PA21: f-ed 5+ q)*

**Figure 21: What are the defining characteristics of your peer support group? (Q.26)**





A further factor driving these networks was the need to feel respected. As I have noted, many PAs experienced an erosion of their confidence in the face of a lack of respect and/or recognition from other professionals. Finding a group of colleagues who would allow them to talk about their confusions and lack of confidence without making them feel inadequate was a key driver.

*"My support is from colleagues who I feel I can trust to get things off my chest safely. I go to people who think the same way I do."*

*(PA37: f-sw 10+ q)*

*"They are trustworthy & help problem solve without putting my work & efforts down." (PA128: f- yw 5+ q)*

*"Same aims in relation to young people even though our roles are different. Mutual respect for roles. Trusting, good communication established."*

*(PA13:f-ewo 15+ q)*

There were also a number of responses indicating that finding colleagues with similar values and approaches to working with young people was important in enabling them to explore their role.

*"They view young people similarly to me & appreciate you need to be consistent, upfront and understanding to make effective working relations. They also are very flexible in their way of working with young people." (PA01: f-yw 5+ q)*

*"People who I feel have a similar level of commitment to helping young people overcome problems and use similar approaches. I choose to talk to people whose approach is similar to mine." (PA225: f-ca 5+ q)*

I explored the drivers behind the PAs support networks in the interviews and found a similar range of themes. In particular, however, the interviews made clearer the significance of the opportunity to explore ways to develop good practice with colleagues.



*"We thought it was very important that we all got together and were able to discuss things. Because we're so isolated – you miss each other, and it's nice to catch up. We find we come up against the same issues and we find it very helpful and that it also shares good practice." (PA75: m-ca 5+ i)*

*"I think it's important to have a group of people who understand, even if it's just to put it in context and to reassure you that you're not completely out on a limb. It's really helpful to sound it out with someone else and hear them say they agree with you – or even disagree - but at least be on the same wavelength. It's helpful to touch base every now and then and check out that you're not the only one that thinks the way you do." (PA204: f-ca 15+ i)*

*"I've had to learn as I went along and I've done that mainly through the support of colleagues. I don't know if everyone feels as clear as I feel I do. I feel I've moved on. I've had to seek out people to help me ...so I've sought out people who I thought were doing the Connexions role well. I go to people and ask for help from those I feel I can learn from. I wanted to learn from the people I could see did seem to be effective and able to move young people on." (PA225: f-ca 5+ i)*

Williams (2000:10) has argued that identity is 'created and revised through close relationships with others' with whom we develop a 'sense of support and community', 'a sense of belonging' and of 'networking'. She argues that from this position, identity can be seen as dynamic, or constantly in the process of being constructed as the relations, practices and discourses which surround individuals change. The responses from the PAs in my research indicate some support for this assertion. The significance of a supportive network within which one can explore and develop professional skills and knowledge emerged as one of the main themes from this research into how we begin to build and stabilise a professional identity in times of change and I will return to a fuller discussion of this in the next chapter. In the absence of any suitable managerial support, supervision and guidance, PAs indicated that they were beginning to develop some role clarity and identity for themselves through seeking out and exploring their role with 'like-minded' others. In this respect, it is important to emphasise that they were not necessarily networking with people from the same previous professional background. Crucially it was a combination of people facing similar challenges and who worked from a similar value base that drove the formation of their support networks



### **Exploring Practice Values**

As I have noted above, there was evidence in the responses of a disquiet surrounding the sort of identity PAs felt was being created for Connexions by the national publicity. There was also a lot of disquiet and role conflict surrounding the pressure they felt from having to meet the nationally set targets – most especially those concerned with reducing the 'NEET group'. As I discussed in chapter 2, one of the government's aims in establishing the Connexions Service was to increase the numbers of young people engaged in education, training and employment (ETE). Research (SEU 1999b) informing the development of the Connexions strategy had indicated that some 10% of young people fell into a group known as the NEET group (Not in Education, Employment or Training) and annual targets were, as a consequence, imposed on the Connexions partnerships to reduce this number.

There was evidence in my research that PAs experienced a clash between these national and organisational objectives and the more holistic way in which they felt they could and should be developing their role with young people. PAs reflected on the tension they experienced in being unable to meet the young person's needs or expectations due to inadequate resourcing and conflicting expectations from managers and other professionals. There was a strong sense in both the questionnaire and the interview responses that 'others' did not always understand or value the person centred approach to working with young people that these respondents believe informs and underpins their work. This often led to conflict and confusion with managers, schools and other agencies who were perceived as valuing other shorter term 'outcomes'.

*"There is pressure to get young people into ETE which isn't always appropriate, they need to understand the time a lot of these young people need to engage and move forward." (PA5: f-yw 5+ q)*

*"I feel that long term we are doing a dis-service to young people. The pressure to focus on NEET detracts from developmental work."  
(PA197 m-ca 15+ q)*

*"There's a lot of emphasis on behavioural support/change from teachers. They've not much idea of the 'holistic' approach we take. My disillusionment is based on the difference between ideal and practical work. I'm resigned to doing what they want rather than what we should." (PA107 m-ed 5+ q)*



*“There’s a lack of understanding of how the role was intended. There is a need to spend more time with individuals, home visits, taking clients to appointments.” (PA36 f-ca 10+ q)*

As I have noted in chapter 2, Halford and Leonard (1999:103) concluded that two discourses on the relationship between work and identity dominate the literature. One of these is to view identity construction as ‘structural’ – that *who* we are is constructed out of what we do. From this position, while personal choice may play some initial role in our choice of occupation, from that point onwards ‘individuals develop distinctive identities as a consequence of their *structural* location’ within an organisation or agency. The other position views identity construction as ‘agentic’ – that the work we choose to do is a way of expressing our true self and that we may seek out particular workplaces and/or occupations that enable us to ‘be ourselves’. From this perspective people may see change as a threat to their sense of identity and so will ‘resist, adapt or circumvent’ in order to maintain their old sense of self.

As I have noted in Figure 12 above, there was some evidence amongst responses to the questionnaire that professional identity was structurally constructed by the identity of the organisation or service one worked within.

*“Identity is created by being in an organisation where the majority of staff share the same aims for the organisation. Having a group of colleagues who share the same type of work.” (PA188: f-ca 10+ q)*

*“I always used to feel quite proud of working in the Careers Service. There was always a sense that you knew what you were doing and who you were working for and why you were doing it. Now it’s all so much less tangible. I used to have a real sense of who I was and why I was there – and I don’t think I have that anymore.” (PA197: m-ca 10+ q)*

*“Connexions as a service has some identity because of marketing & I have some unease about being identified with it.” (PA29: m-ca 10+ q)*

*“On occasions I have to say I work for Connexions. It makes me feel tainted if I’m honest.” (PA21: f-ed 5+ q)*



However, there was much more evidence to suggest that, for these respondents, the way in which they choose to work with young people was a more significant factor in shaping their professional identities. Halford and Leonard (1999) argue that the majority of change management initiatives work from a 'structural' interpretation in striving to create a new organisational culture or identity. They suggest that organisations try to 'bend individual identities to their own imperatives' and fail to take sufficient account of people's 'agentic needs'. This issue emerged as a key factor in relation to the way Connexions PAs discussed their feelings about their identity in the interviews.

*"If someone tells you you're going to be someone else – unless you're a very conforming person – you have to have some investment in it – to identify with it in some way. Otherwise you're going to become a very unhappy workforce, or people will leave. You should want to change. You've got to be able to see the point of it, to be able to relate to it. This has been externally imposed. We were told we had to conform."  
(PA204: f-ca 15+ i)*

*"Change is easier to take on board if you value the opinion of people initiating the change. It was because the change was imposed by people who we felt didn't know what they were talking about." (PA138: f-ca 5+ i)*

*"One of the main factors is that those acquiring the professional identity should want to acquire it. Careers advisers were given no choice in the matter and many remain very bitter about being 'sold down the river' with false promises. If I had wanted to be a social worker or youth worker I would have trained as one. They can always return to social/youth work or teaching. We do not have that luxury. We have to stand by helplessly as we become more and more de-skilled in an organisation whose design was fundamentally flawed from the outset." (PA138: f-ca 5+ i).*

### **Transitional Identity**

Although there was an undoubtedly 'loud' message coming through the responses on the questionnaires that PAs were unhappy with the role they had been 'thrown into', that they felt 'under-valued' and 'unrecognised', 'confused' and in many cases 'angry'. I also found a pattern in many of the responses that suggested some PAs were finding a



way to work through this confusion and to begin to come to terms with their new role and identity.

*"I suppose what's happening now is that people are coming to terms with it I can see the point of Connexions more now." (PA204: f-ca 15+q)*

I felt that I knew about the confusion, hurt and anger – I had been listening to expressions of this since 2001 – and while there are lessons to be learned from this about how radical change affecting role is introduced and managed, I wanted to move beyond this analysis. In the questionnaires there were references to 'it's changing now' or 'I feel more confident about it now'. It was this theme of identity in transition that informed my selection of interviewees with the aim of uncovering some of the factors that facilitated this transition. My interest was in exploring the processes by which practitioners managed the threats to their 'old' professional identities, when placed in new, blended roles and how (or if) they constructed new identities. In particular, I was interested to explore how the PAs re-negotiated and stabilised their professional identity within the reality of their new role.

One of the messages to emerge from the questionnaires had been that PAs felt they were being left to 'do it for themselves' – left to create the role that they could feel comfortable with and could communicate to others. Having found themselves thrust into a confusing role without clear management or supervision, they had, in a sense, to 'just get on with it'. Taking such a route, however, requires a degree of self-confidence and so I was interested to explore this process further with the interviewees. One of the main factors that appeared to enable them to build confidence in their new role was the re-discovery and assertion of their professional values.

As we have seen, considerable anxiety was caused by the challenge of an imposed role and a practice governed by external targets and the expectations of others. Responses on the questionnaires indicated that despite the confusion, anger and resistance to enforced organisational change, unsupportive and unclear management and the fear that their professional skills were no longer valued, this group of practitioners genuinely cared about young people and they experienced their face to face work as deeply satisfying. As I explored this further in the interviews, a picture began to emerge of a group of professionals who possess and are driven by a strong value base to their work, and who, in many cases, went into the field of working with young people because of this value base.



*"I went from industry, to secondary teaching. I wasn't happy as a teacher I didn't like that classroom setting. I was more drawn to the pastoral side and I felt there was a huge gap in provision. I constantly felt I was letting young people down. I came into this field (careers) because I really liked the idea of working one-to-one." (PA225: f-ca 5+ i)*

*"I have a long and varied past in employment in industry, but had done voluntary work. When I was made redundant I decided I was much more committed to the voluntary sector and got a job within it. I absolutely loved it. It told me I was much more attracted to 'social business'. I like having a vision – an idea that I'm working for a bigger purpose.*

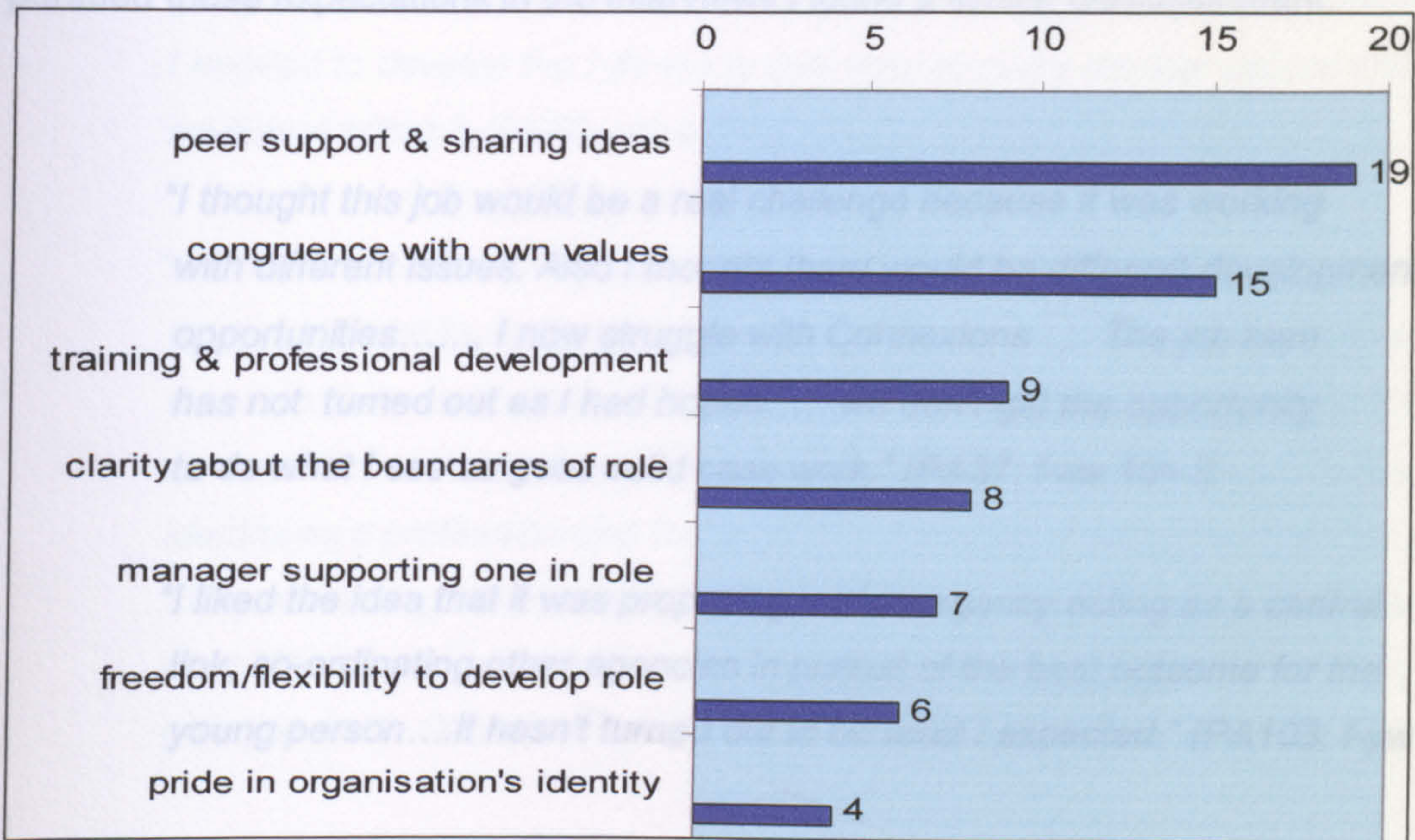
*I have always related to the human side of the work." (PA108: m-ca 5+ i)*

*"When I read what was being said about the reasons behind Connexions, I thought it represented everything that I thought was wrong with youth work. Connexions sounded to me like 'ideal' youth work. I'd describe it as 'intensive youth work' rather than the 'sitting around in the evening' type youth work."*  
*(PA71: m-yw 5+ i)*

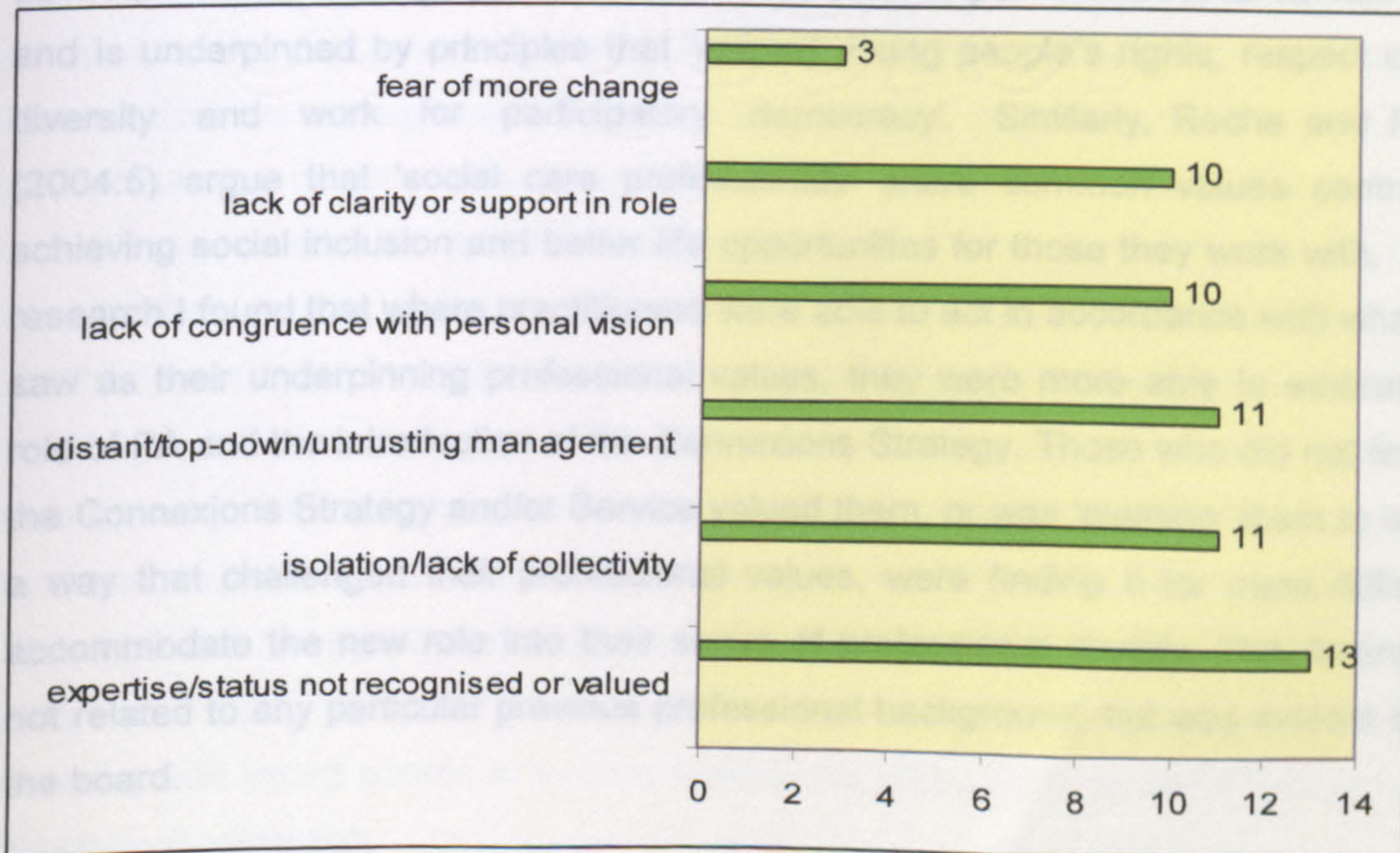
Hoggett (2005:5) reported a similar finding in his recent research into how 'regeneration workers' negotiate conflicting demands on their role. His research team found that professionals 'bring something to their role in terms of values, identities and emotional capacities which pre-exists their engagement in that role'. They hypothesised that this was a significant factor in the ability to demonstrate resilience when negotiating what they call the 'dilemmatic spaces' created by the introduction of initiatives focused on 'short-term outputs and measurables' (p.4). Values, Hoggett suggests, provide us a 'kind of compass' and help with our 'orientation' (p.7). I will return to a discussion of this process of 'orientation' in the next chapter, as I believe it has considerable relevance to the strategies adopted by PAs in negotiating their new role identity.



**Figure 22: Emergent themes from the interviews: Factors facilitating development of a stable professional role identity.**



**Figure 23: Emergent themes from the interviews: Factors hindering development of a stable professional role identity.**





In the questionnaires there had been a strong sense of disappointment, for many, that expectations about the possibilities of the new role had not been met and when I pursued these expectations in the interviews I found a similar disillusionment.

*"I thought this job would be a real challenge because it was working with different issues. Also I thought there would be different development opportunities..... I now struggle with Connexions..... The job here has not turned out as I had hoped.....we don't get the opportunity to do what I see as good solid case work." (PA37: f-sw 10+ i)*

*"I liked the idea that it was proposing – of an agency acting as a central link, co-ordinating other agencies in pursuit of the best outcome for the young person....It hasn't turned out to be what I expected." (PA103: f-yw 5+ i)*

This value base informing 'how I want to work with young people' was clearly an important factor in shaping feelings of 'who I am' as a professional and in building confidence in that identity. Banks (1999:3) suggests that youth work shares concerns about 'professional integrity, trustworthiness and honesty in relation to its service users' and is underpinned by principles that 'respect young people's rights, respect cultural diversity and work for participatory democracy'. Similarly, Roche and Rankin (2004:5) argue that 'social care professionals' share common values centred on achieving social inclusion and better life opportunities for those they work with. In my research I found that where practitioners were able to act in accordance with what they saw as their underpinning professional values, they were more able to embrace the role of PA and the introduction of the Connexions Strategy. Those who did not feel that the Connexions Strategy and/or Service valued them, or was 'pushing' them to work in a way that challenged their professional values, were finding it far more difficult to accommodate the new role into their sense of professional identity. This finding was not related to any particular previous professional background, but was evident across the board.

The PAs who were beginning to work their way through this anxiety appeared to be doing so by examining the roots of their discomfort and finding a way to practise that overcame it.



*"I thought it was very important to develop my role myself – to make me feel secure. If I waited for somebody else to define it they'd never do it. You don't get guidelines. And so I think it's a responsibility we have to take on ourselves I needed to develop the role in my own style to make me feel secure and confident with it." (PA75: m-ca 5+ i)*

*"Identity is secured by deciding who we are, what we do and what we do not do – not be dictated to by others and to have them decide what we do or don't do and how we will work. I feel what we need to say is, 'This is who we are', 'This is what we can do and can offer', etc. We don't have that sort of identity as a profession and the schools are in some ways deciding for us. They are driving what we should be doing. I feel we should stop being 'wimpy' about things and say what we are and aren't going to do and how we are going to do it. Otherwise we will be dictated to." (PA103: f-yw 5+ i)*

Many of the respondents in the questionnaire had indicated that they felt themselves to be losing the 'firm ground' of their familiar skills and knowledge and this was causing them to lose confidence in their 'expertise'. It also emerged that the opportunity to grow as a professional, either through supervision, guidance or support from a manager was something that was either missing from, or inappropriate to, the organisational context of their work. Responses tended to indicate that, in the absence of any clarity or leadership from management, PAs were beginning to shape their role in response to the presenting needs of the young people they work with. In many cases this was experienced as stimulating and challenging because it was forcing them to develop and update their practice skills and knowledge. A similar finding was reported by Anning (2005:2) who found that although professional identities were threatened by a move to multi-agency team working, participants in her research spoke of 'the creative energy released by forging enhanced, or even multiple identities' (p.2) and of their enhanced professional knowledge as a result of taking on new roles. While for the PAs in my research, this 'young person centred' approach did sometimes lead practitioners to feel they were being asked to practise on the borders of their competence or safety, working with young people in a more flexible way was generally perceived as being a positive development.



*"One good thing about Connexions is that it's not boring. A lot of people have said this to me who used to be in mainstream careers."*  
(PA197: m-ca 10+ i)

*"I would hate to just be doing careers now. The intensive stuff is much more interesting to me."* (PA111: f-ca 5+ i)

*"I've realised I'm much more suited to the intensive type role. I get much more satisfaction from that sort of engagement. When I trained I didn't know that I was going to be able to engage with teenagers with difficulties. I thought it would be easier to do the careers. However, I've learned that I can engage with teenage lads effectively and I enjoy it."* (PA225: f-ca 5+ i)

In this chapter I have attempted to represent the themes emerging from participants' responses faithfully and with integrity. My aim in constructing this research was to explore the ways in which practitioners construct new professional identities and whether, and how, they manage threats to their 'old' professional identities, when placed in new, blended roles that have no established community of practice. Through an analysis of participant responses to the questionnaires and the interviews I have been able to develop a framework of some of the factors contributing to the construction of a professional identity and to examine the impact on identity of the creation of a new role and title. One of the themes to emerge has been the significance of building new networks of practice to help stabilise evolving identities. In the next chapter I will build on this emergent analysis in relation to some of the theoretical frameworks examined in chapters 2 and 3 and present a discussion of what I have conceived of as the 'Connected Identity'.



## **6. Connected Identities: An emergent model of professional identity in transition**

This thesis has been set within a framework that sees the concept of professional identity as a 'moveable feast' (Hall, 1992). This position maintains that the de-stabilising of established roles and identities has caused something of a 'crisis'. Hall (1992:275) has suggested that 'identity' only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, 'when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty'. For the practitioners in my research, 'crisis' was precipitated by the introduction of a new role that had no established guidelines, boundaries or communities of practice. The impact of this crisis on their existing identity was to generate feelings of loss, uncertainty, betrayal, disrespect and marginalisation.

However, as I have explained in the previous chapter, what began to interest me, as I worked through the participant responses to the questionnaire, were the strategies adopted in response to those feelings of confusion and uncertainty. It emerged that some PAs were developing strategies to help them work through the crisis. My research, therefore, has been concerned with uncovering the processes by which these practitioners worked through crisis to re-negotiate their professional identities. Resilience has been described as 'the ability to bounce back having endured adversity' (Gilligan, 2000:37) and as 'the ability to thrive, mature, and increase competence in the face of adverse circumstances or obstacles' (Gordon-Rouse, 2001:461). If we accept, as this thesis has argued, that de-stabilising change and states of flux are inevitable in the modern world, exploring the processes by which practitioners achieve resilience in the face of uncertainty is of considerable interest.

The responses of the PAs in my research reflect many of the concerns surrounding the design and introduction of the Connexions strategy as outlined in chapter 2. The 'difficult, almost contradictory task' (Moore, 2005:25) of Connexions, designated as an agency for all young people, but borne out of a concern for the smaller proportion of socially excluded youth, contributed to the confusions and vulnerabilities in role described by the PAs in my sample. Responses, in particular those from some ex-careers advisers, reflect the concerns arising from the imposed changes to the Careers



Service. Whereas before Connexions they had been used to providing an almost universal, school-based, service delivering careers advice and guidance, their new role became progressively re-focused on working more holistically with those who had dropped out of the education, training and employment system, or were at risk of doing so. This raised considerable concerns over the marginalisation of their specialist skills and was seen to pose a threat to the quality of advice and guidance given to the wider population of young people. Furthermore, many respondents, in particular those who had trained as careers advisers, expressed their concerns about being required to work in ways and with issues that they felt under-qualified to deal with.

The PAs' responses also reflected the concerns surrounding the monitoring of young people's progress and the imposition of targets, as discussed in chapter 2. Responses from across the professional backgrounds reflect the challenge to practice and professional values that was experienced by too rigid a focus on the NEET target and pressure to encourage young people to take up EET options. Many expressed the concern that the emphasis on EET destinations was discouraging them from working with young people on softer outcomes and underlying needs, which young people may need first in order to be able to achieve the harder outcomes.

As I outlined in chapter 1, however, this thesis was not intended to be 'about Connexions', nor has its intention been to evaluate the policy behind the Connexions strategy. My starting position has been that change, and challenge to professional roles and identities, are inevitable in the current political context. I have explored the impact on professional identities of moves to create new blended and 'joined-up' roles, but more importantly my aim has been to explore the processes by which identities are re-negotiated within this changing framework. It has not been my intention to offer value judgements about whether change is a 'good' or a 'bad' thing, or whether practitioners should or should not change. My position is that ongoing change and restructuring is the current reality facing most public sector practitioners and this fundamental restructuring is leading to a radical re-examination of our identities. Exploring the process by which this evolution occurs can offer some insights into how we can help to make it less painful, and more fruitful, for the individuals concerned.

### **What's in a Name?**

As we have seen, the change towards introducing an integrated youth support service, and with it the move towards a more blended practitioner role, led to the identity confusion and vulnerability expressed by the PA respondents. The confusion



vulnerability and perceived loss of status and esteem affected their identity on two connected levels. Firstly, 'No one recognises us', and secondly, 'We don't know who we are'. The connection between these appeared to be that, 'If we don't have a collective view of who we are and what we can offer, then how can anyone else know who and what we are?'. Furthermore, 'because we aren't really sure who we are, there is a danger that others will force us to be what they want us to be'. As I have noted in the previous chapter, responses from across the professional backgrounds indicated a very strong perception that, unless others were able to recognise and understand one's job title and role, it is very difficult to maintain a sense of having a professional 'identity'. The importance of recognition and respect from others emerged as a significant issue for these respondents and led to the tendency to reject the 'new' role title in favour of holding on to a previous, more familiar, or recognisable title.

There was resistance to the new role title Personal Adviser, but it emerged that the relationship between job title (and qualification) and professional identity related more to the need for recognition and understanding by others of the purpose, values and boundaries of their role. PAs appeared to feel that in order to work effectively in inter-professional settings, the 'other' professionals (and indeed the service users) needed to understand what the contribution of each of them could be. There was a perception that 'everyone' understood how established roles and job titles could contribute to professional case work but not how this new role and title of Personal Adviser fitted in. However, others (Barnes et al., 2000; Pollard et al., 2005) have found that it is often the case that perceptions about the attributes and roles of other professions are frequently inaccurate, outdated and resistant to change. It seems unlikely therefore that the perception that 'everyone' understood their previous established roles would stand up to closer scrutiny.

As I have discussed in earlier chapters, the 'post-modern subject' is conceived as having no fixed, essential or permanent identity (Hall, 1992; Stronach et al., 2002). 'Identity' is seen as being a 'moveable feast' with the subject assuming different identities at different times. As Lawler (2002:255) suggests, identity is not something which can be 'read off from an externally imposed schema'. People may well belong to designated groups – such as 'youth worker' or 'careers adviser' – but this in itself does not tell us about the kinds of individual identities that they build. Bates (1990:67) has remarked on the 'chameleon-like ability' of Careers Guidance 'to change in hue according to the prevailing socio-economic climate and political forces'. Bradford (2005:58) has argued that youth work is 'an ambiguous set of practices, pushed in



different directions at different times by different interests', while even Smith (2002) acknowledges that, when people talk about youth work, 'they can mean very different things'.

### **Exploring Practice**

Given the multitude of changes to the organisation and structure of children and young people's services, it is difficult to establish an absolute definition of the professional identities of those involved. Tucker has described attempts to construct a stable occupational identity as a 'site of struggle' wherein competing discourses are juggling for position (Tucker, 2005:211, citing Foucault, 1991). However, he agrees that ways of working with young people change over time in response to differing and new demands and priorities with the result that an occupational identity for youth working has never been fixed 'in any absolute sense' (Tucker, 2005:212). As Williamson (2005b:80) has pointed out, there are some who respond to the perceived 'threat' to their identity by becoming 'reactive' or defensive about their role and their 'profession' and who, in so doing, risk being seen as 'out of touch' or unwilling to engage in current debates about practice. Williamson (2005b) goes on to argue that one of the purposes of 'good' youth work practice is to engage with young people in ways that 'lead them out and forward' and that the challenge for practitioners is to be able to explain 'in contemporary language, how and why this is done' (p.81).

Responses from some PAs in my research suggest that, when confronted with the challenge and confusion of trying to determine who and what they were, they gained more confidence and stability from exploring *why* they do what they do. Halford and Leonard (1999:119) came to similar conclusions about the relationship between label and identity. They found that rather than take on a new identity through 'labelling from above', individuals appear to take a 'more agentic role in evaluating (the ideologies) and placing themselves in relation to it'.

My literature review in chapter 2 indicated that there is no single, identifiable practice with commonly agreed characteristics for either youth work or careers guidance, nor for any of the other professional backgrounds entering Connexions. It did appear, however, that both guidance workers and youth workers might lay claim to a holistic and empowering approach to working with young people. Based on the work of Carl Rogers (1967), holistic approaches claim that a person's situation cannot normally be considered separately from other factors operating within their social context. Based on the range of literature explored in chapter 2, I concluded that both youth workers



and guidance practitioners would prefer to disassociate themselves from notions of 'problem youth', preferring instead to work with all young people. Both professions appear to place importance on forming friendly and trusting relationships with young people and helping them to achieve their full potential.

The respondents in my study also indicated that they would prefer to work in a way that valued relationships and processes, long-term and sustainable change and outcomes rather than outputs. It was these values and these approaches to practice that were perceived to be threatened by the pressure to work in a targeted way within Connexions. Youth work practice seeks to engage young people in conversation and discussion about key issues affecting their lives. As Trotter (1999) points out, professionals working with young people use an approach characterised by 'clear, honest and frequent discussions' and by the use of 'a collaborative problem-solving approach which focuses on the young person's definition of problems and goals'. Jeffs and Smith (1996:30) suggest that youth workers develop relationships with young people primarily through 'conversation' which involves 'concern, trust, respect, appreciation, affection and hope', and that in order to build and maintain trust with young people, workers need to be 'fair, truthful, punctilious about fulfilling obligations, thoughtful and unselfish in their conduct' (p.53).

In their responses, some of the PAs in my research expressed considerable disquiet about the pressure they felt from having to meet the nationally set targets – most especially those concerned with reducing the 'NEET group'. It emerged that these PAs experienced a clash between these national and organisational objectives and the more holistic way in which they felt they could and should be developing their role with young people. Responses suggested that, despite the confusion, anger and resistance to enforced change, this group of practitioners genuinely cared about young people and they experienced their face to face work as deeply satisfying. In the absence of any clarity or leadership from management, these PAs were beginning to shape their role in response to the presenting needs of the young people they worked with. In many cases this was experienced as positive and stimulating, causing them to re-visit, re-examine and develop their practice skills and knowledge.

### **Practice Networks**

Taylor (2004:86) has suggested that the process of transition into a new professional role and identity involves undergoing a period of 'unlearning'. This, she suggests can be seen as a 'transformative' experience of personal growth involving what she



describes as 'receptivity, recognition and grieving'. Receptivity involves being open to new evidence, ideas or ways of working. Recognition involves recognising the validity of the new ideas or evidence to support the new practices. And grieving involves the loss and confusion that may be experienced when new ideas 'touch the core of professional identity'. Taylor suggests that practitioners must 'unlearn' before they can be effectively open to new practices and that the most effective way to achieve this is within a 'safe environment with informed, trusted and engaged colleagues'.

Eraut (2004a) has suggested that professionals in transition need to be given a great deal of support, 'especially during the early stages of change when they are disoriented and often disillusioned' and that they need to be 'encouraged' to share their experiences and learn how to adapt the new approach to their own context. Eraut (2004b) explores and evaluates some of the approaches that can be used and concludes that, 'those who have spent time sharing their practice with others ... do find that they are able to articulate more of their knowledge than colleagues without such experience'. He also asserts that they 'claim to be more critical about their practice as a result of trying to spell it out' (Eraut 2004b:176). Whilst acknowledging the difficulties in arranging such opportunities, he agrees that they do seem to lead to the development of a more exploratory, prospective approach to practice. However, he has also observed that in 'all but a few notable exceptions', managers and policy makers have tended to regard change as a 'political and administrative process involving decision-making and persuasion, rather than as a learning process'.

My research with Connexions PAs would tend to support this view. Those participants in my study who reported having the opportunity to meet with peers and explore the role and the work collectively, found that this was an important contributory factor in building a resilient identity. Significantly, most PAs claimed that such opportunities were rarely available within their day to day work environment. PAs linked their sense of confusion in role with their sense of isolation and the feeling that their managers were not able to give them the support and guidance they needed. They also recognised that the way their work was organised, with most of them being isolated in individual schools, meant that there were no opportunities to discuss and explore practice issues together. Hoggett (2005:6) also found that 'most' of his sample of 'regeneration workers' received 'little effective support' from their own management and as a consequence had to construct their own means of support, 'many relying heavily on local networks of like-minded colleagues'.



As discussed in chapter 3, above, there is a consensus in the literature of the need for increased opportunities for appropriate professional dialogue to take place in an environment where practitioners feel 'safe' and 'respected'. Avis (2005:218), for example, has called for work relations that provide space for dialogue and creativity in order to respond to the 'uncertainties, risks and opportunities that currently exist'. His observation, that such possibilities are constrained by the 'lived realities' of practitioners is supported by the experiences of PAs in my research. Avis argues that a performance culture marked by an emphasis on accountability is not one in which risk taking or the development of creative problem solving will readily take place (p.212). Performance management, he asserts, stifles innovation and encourages deeply conservative practices.

Similarly, Boyask et al (2004) have called for a model of professional practice that they call 'the involved professional', modelled on the notion of 'involvedness'. They argue that the 'top down' approach to the drive for modernisation has resulted in practitioners becoming the implementers of policies decided elsewhere and that this has led to confusions around and perceived threats to professional identity. The 'involved professional', they argue, should be able to 'participate in shaping the dynamic professional culture in which they are engaged by drawing on the professional knowledge which policy makers and managers may not possess' (Boyask et al., 2004:3). This would involve drawing on the 'collective skills and knowledge of their communities' and seeking out and 'trailing theoretical rationales' to help them make sense of their context and experience. Their model of the involved professional prioritises what they call the 'sociality of decision making, knowledge and learning' for professional development. In other words, professional development should include 'learning to learn with others' and to see learning as a multi-disciplinary and social activity, rather than something we approach as individuals.

One of the important themes to emerge from my research is the significance of adequate 'time-out' (Sloper et al., 1999), 'space and place' (Brockbank et al., 2003), for dialogue amongst practitioners and that, where possible, this should be built in to the structure of the working week. Dialogue, in this analysis, can be defined as seeking to 'enquire, to share meanings, to understand the whole and to uncover one's assumptions' (Preskill and Torres, 1999:92) and as 'a sustained, collective inquiry into the processes, assumptions and certainties that compose everyday experience' (Vince 1996:71). Eraut (1998:136) conceives of this process as developing professional 'capability' and suggests that part of a professional's capability involves 'being able to



develop or transform one's practice over time, to create new knowledge through one's practice as well as learning from others'. An ongoing process of discursive exploration of practice within which practitioners continually negotiate the possibilities and limitations of their role is central to my model of the Connected Identity.

Responses indicated that many of these PAs were seeking out and building networks with colleagues 'who understand what I'm talking about' and who face similar challenges in their day to day work. Having day to day contact with these colleagues was less important than feeling themselves to be understood and respected, indicating that their networks were not necessarily based on convenience or immediate teams. Furthermore, while some responses indicated that similar professional background was a factor in their choice, a greater number were networking across professional boundaries. For them the shared experience of the challenges of the new role and the opportunity to explore ways to develop good practice were more important.

Being left to work out one's own role was not a choice most would have welcomed at the outset. There was considerable criticism of the way they felt 'thrown into' situations without guidance, support or induction. In many cases this was experienced as poor practice leading to confusion, insecurity and in some cases distress. Interestingly, however, when reflecting back on the process, many PAs felt that this freedom and flexibility was something that they valued. On further analysis, what many were saying was that far from developing the role alone or in isolation, they were in fact - in great part because of the lack of guidance - seeking out the support of colleagues, networking and sharing ideas of how to practise within the new context in a young person centred way.

Williams (2000:10) has argued that identity is 'created and revised through close relationships with others' with whom we develop a 'sense of support and community', 'a sense of belonging' and of 'networking'. She argues that from this position, identity can be seen as dynamic, or constantly in the process of being constructed as the relations, practices and discourses which surround individuals change. Responses from some of the PAs in my research indicate some support for this assertion. The opportunity to meet together and create an environment within which to explore practice issues and challenges emerged as a key factor in helping them re-negotiate their professional identities as PAs.



*"We were given time out recently as a community team. That was really good ....and we had a lot of our sessions in our community area and that helps give you a bit of an identity. That was a really positive thing It gave us more ownership of what/how we wanted to contribute to the agenda I really felt that I was a 'part of something' by having time out with a group of colleagues. And we really did gel and got some very good ideas together. We came up with our own targets and I thought that showed a lot of vision by management to say, 'We trust you to get on and do it'. Trust is important." (PA197: m-ca 10+ i)*

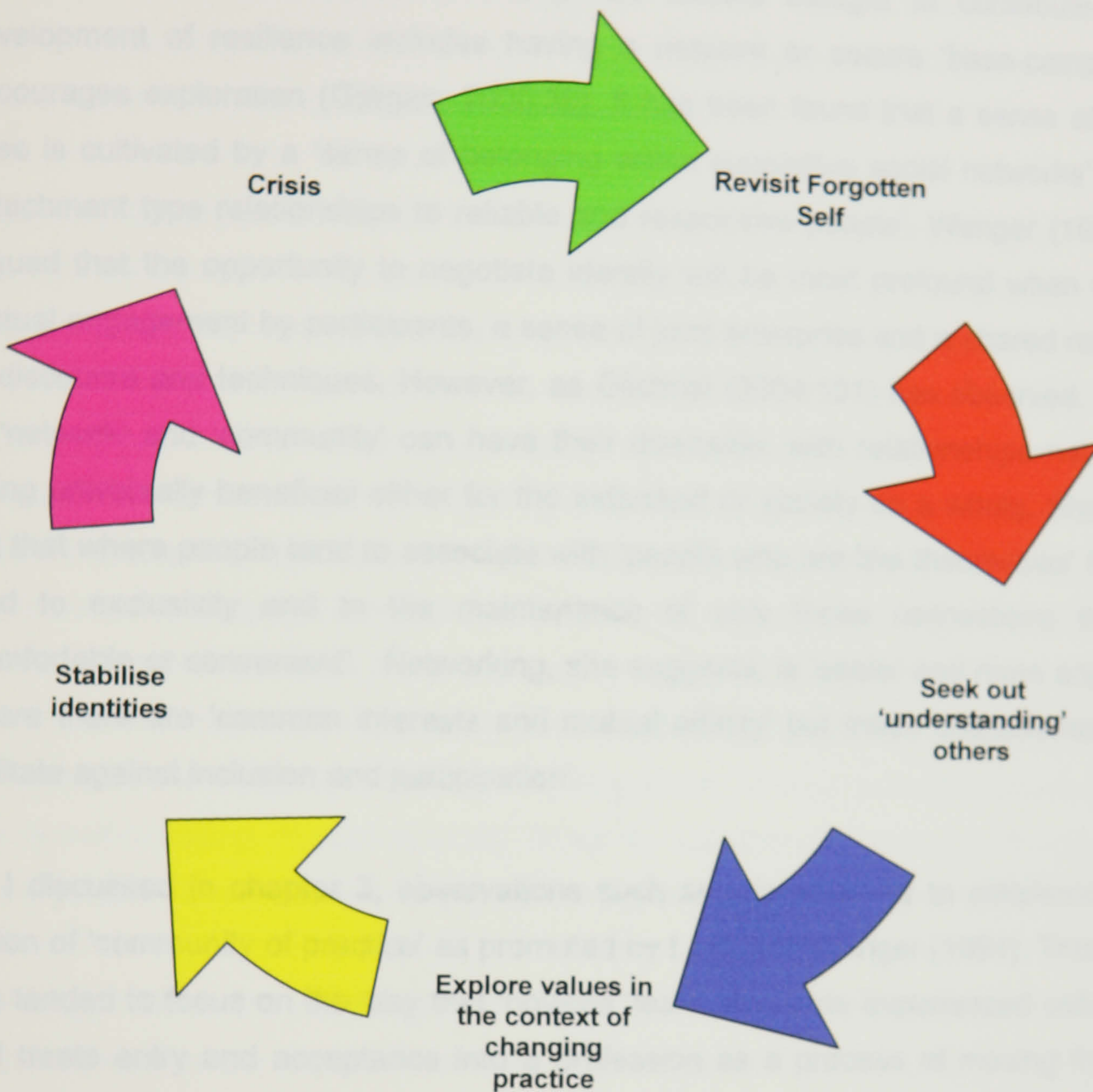
### **The Connected Identity**

Emerging from my reflections on the responses of the PAs is my conceptualisation of the 'Connected Identity' (Figure 24). This analysis takes the view that professional identity is dynamic and constantly in the process of being re-constructed as discourses on practice change. Importantly, also, this analysis maintains that change is not about abandoning a previous identity; rather it is about transforming it. In this analysis, exploration of identity is precipitated by a crisis or challenge to one's existing identity, for example, by the introduction of a new role. The PAs' experience showed that such a crisis could highlight the clash between one's values and how one is being asked to practise which emphasises the importance of those values to one's identity. At this stage one is confronted with a period of questioning and exploration.

Markus and Nurius (1986:954) have represented this period of questioning as an exploration of one's 'possible selves', that is, ideas 'about what one might become, what one would like to become, and what one is afraid of becoming'. However, in undergoing an exploration of their professional identity, it seemed to me that the PAs in my research were in fact re-visiting their 'forgotten selves'. They were exploring how their preferred style and values related to the new and different contexts. This appeared to support Erikson's (1968) view that during the process in which a sense of identity develops or transforms there will be an unconscious striving for continuity with a previous sense of self, what Hall (1996:4) refers to as 'the changing same'



**Figure 24: The Connected Identity**



It was the process of re-visiting their 'forgotten selves' that drove the PAs to seek out 'like-minded others' – other practitioners who were striving to explore the values and principles behind their role. These were colleagues who were likely to be in the new role but not necessarily colleagues with whom PAs had shared a previous professional identity. Thus, it was the exploration of the core values of practice that drove the formation of networks rather than the familiarity of professional role, title or qualification. As I noted in the previous chapter, Hoggett (2005:7) conceives of this process as one of 'orientation', with the core values, or sense of agency, acting as a 'kind of compass' when we find ourselves in dilemmatic spaces. I find this description



very helpful in illustrating the process of exploration that the PAs were describing in my own research.

### **Connectivity not Collectivity**

As I have noted in chapter 3, one of the factors thought to contribute to the development of resilience includes having a network or secure 'base-camp' which encourages exploration (Gilligan, 2000:39). It has been found that a sense of secure base is cultivated by a 'sense of belonging within supportive social networks' and by 'attachment type relationships to reliable and responsive people'. Wenger (1998) has argued that the opportunity to negotiate identity will be most profound when there is mutual engagement by participants, a sense of joint enterprise and a shared repertoire of discourse and techniques. However, as Gilchrist (2004:101) has observed, notions of 'network' and 'community' can have their downside, with relationships not always being universally beneficial either for the individual or society as a whole. She points out that where people tend to associate with 'people who are like themselves' this can lead to exclusivity and to the maintenance of only those connections that are 'comfortable or convenient'. Networking, she suggests, is 'easier and more enjoyable' where there are 'common interests and mutual affinity' but these characteristics can 'militate against inclusion and participation'.

As I discussed in chapter 3, observations such as this have led to criticisms of the notion of 'community of practice' as promoted by Lave and Wenger (1991). This theory has tended to focus on the way that 'novices' learn alongside experienced colleagues and treats entry and acceptance into a profession as a process of moving from the periphery to full participation in the community. Critics, such as Smith (2003a:5), have suggested that 'a danger' with the idea of individuals being 'subsumed' into a community identity, learning to 'speak, act and improvise in ways that make sense in the community', is that there may be situations where the community of practice is weak or exhibits power relationships that seriously inhibit entry and participation' (p 5). Furthermore, communities of practice, as conceived by Lave and Wenger, can lead to a sense of complacency and unwillingness to explore practice.

It is in relation to some of these ideas that Engeström's (1999) notion of 'contradictions', as discussed in chapter 3, has relevance. The premise behind Engeström's theory is that, within the changing contexts that generate crises of identity, tensions are inevitable. If progress is to be made towards creating new forms of knowledge and practice, these tensions and differences must be acknowledged and



articulated. If too great an emphasis is placed on 'consensual models of working' that ignore the underlying contradictions, opportunities for 'expansive learning' (Engeström 2001) will be constrained. 'Expansive learning' is a concept that allows for the collaborative construction of new forms of activity in 'emergent situations where routines may not exist'. In order to negotiate change, the professionals involved in expansive learning must work through the confusions and contradictions, articulating differences and exploring alternative approaches.

Engeström (2001) emphasises that 'contradiction' is not the same thing as 'conflict'. Although contradictions can generate 'disturbances and conflicts' they can also often promote innovative and transformative practice. When contradictions in practice are introduced through the introduction of new roles, individuals begin to question their existing practice and assumptions and this can escalate into what he calls 'collaborative envisioning'. Gilchrist (2004:120) suggests a similar dynamic and adaptive process in her analysis of the 'well-connected community'. She argues that 'complexity theory' offers a model of a 'community poised at the edge of chaos' that is able to survive in turbulent times because it 'evolves forms of collective organisation that fit the environmental conditions'. In her analysis, the 'well-connected community' will demonstrate 'insight and intelligence, responding to local or external perturbations and accommodating internal diversity. It will be capable of learning from experience and developing strategies for dealing with unusual situations and eventualities' (p.121).

It emerged from the responses of some PAs in my research that one of the characteristics of the support networks that contributed to their resilience was the capacity to network with people facing similar challenges in the new role and not necessarily people who shared their previous professional background. This is similar to what Engeström (2001:6) has described as 'boundary crossing' or 'knot working'. This notion allows for collaboration between practitioners to be conceived of in terms of 'spaces created for renegotiation of professional practices and the reconfiguration of professional identities'. It is characterised by a 'dynamic, dialogic relationship' (Warmington et al., 2004:4) and by a continuously changing connection of professionals. It is a 'participatory model' in which participants are required to recognise and engage with the expertise distributed across rapidly shifting professional groupings.

It seems to me, therefore, that one of the conditions important in facilitating a dynamic approach to professional identity is the importance placed on connectivity rather than



collectivity. Adams and Marshall (1996:432) have argued that there is a dynamic interplay between an individual's identity and the community to which they belong. As a result, an individual's identity is not only shaped by the community, but can also shape and change the nature of that community. Too high a degree of differentiation between the individual and the community, they argue, can be met with a lack of acceptance by and connection with, others, and this can lead to marginalisation. Conversely, low differentiation, or 'extreme connectedness', can inhibit an individual's sense of agency and can lead to difficulties in adapting to changing circumstances. Although Adams and Marshall (1996) were discussing these ideas in relation to work with adolescents, they are relevant to my analysis of the 'connected identity'. If the balance between 'differentiation' and 'sameness' is right, interactions can result in exchanges which facilitate 'adaptive evolution'.

In this chapter, I have presented my own reflections on the processes described by the PAs in my research, as they struggled to understand their new role. Set within the context of continuing change in the field of working with children and young people, my thesis has aimed to contribute to understandings of the ways such change impacts on the professional identities adopted by those involved. In particular, the aim of my research has been to develop an understanding of the strategies Connexions PAs used to help them construct and re-negotiate their identities during times of change. My resulting conceptualisation of the 'connected identity' supports Erikson's (1968) conclusion that we need to conceive of 'identity' as constantly being lost and regained through a process of questioning, exploration and commitment. If the contexts for such questioning and exploration are managed and supported appropriately, such a process can lead to the development of an invigorated and transformative practice that leaves the practitioners involved feeling energised and enthusiastic for their work.

Throughout the process of engaging with the participants in this inquiry I have reflected on the parallels between their experience and that of young people in transition and I have made links between theories of identity development in adolescents and those relating to professional identity and change. Engeström's notion of 'knot-working' as spaces for 'expansive learning' and renegotiation of identities, where 'dynamic and dialogic' relationships are fostered, are also resonant of good youth work practice. As Williamson (2005b:77) has indicated, 'good' youth work practice fosters opportunities where motives can be probed, options explored, different perspectives accommodated and consequences considered. It enables young people to learn through the appreciation of different perspectives and difference'. Often this process takes place in



'shifting locations' with different groupings with the aim of leading young people out and forward' and 'connecting them to their wider world' (Williamson, 2005b 82). As Young (1999) has stressed, however, this is not about forcing them to fit in with our world. 'Its intention is to liberate, as opposed to domesticate, young people' (p 79). The conceptualisation of the 'connected identity', that has emerged from the experiences of youth work practitioners in transition, incorporates some of these same principles

*"You have to be brave and go with it when things feel different or difficult  
It's challenging and you have to make the effort to move out of your comfort  
zone. We tell young people this so we should do it ourselves as well."  
(PA192:f-yw 10+ i)*

This thesis offers a contribution to the literature on the role of 'Communities of Practice' (Wenger, 1998) in shaping professional identities. It has explored the significance of inclusive and adaptive practitioner networks in supporting the resilience of professional values and in facilitating a dynamic and exploratory approach to practice wherein practitioners are able to examine and re-negotiate their identities. In this analysis, 'identity' is not seen as 'fixed' and therefore needing to be 'changed', but as constantly evolving as discourses surrounding practice develop. Although my research is based on the experiences of a sample of Connexions Personal Advisers in 2004, ongoing government policy aimed at integrating the children and young people's workforce gives these findings a wider significance.

In the final chapter I will give a more detailed overview of some of the policy developments that have taken place in this field since the data in this thesis were gathered and analysed. As I have described, government policy continues to be directed at creating a flexible and integrated children and young people's workforce. Considerable further change has taken place within local authorities and in Connexions Services since these data were collected and analysed. Hence, considerable further change and uncertainty continues to face these practitioners and their colleagues in other agencies. The experience of the PAs reported in this thesis, therefore, represents an important contribution to our understanding of how professional identities are negotiated during times of change. In acknowledgment of this continuing change, my final chapter is offered as a kind of 'post-script' to the experiences of the PAs reported on here. Its aim is to provide a brief indication of some of the further developments and change that they have and will be caught up in since they generously participated in my research.



## **7. Epilogue: Message in a bottle**

As I have noted, the professional field of working with children, young people and families is currently undergoing rapid and radical change. The Children's Workforce Strategy (DfES, 2005a) asserts that the government wants to 'stimulate new ways of working and the development of new roles' and that 'over time, the children's workforce could change considerably' (p.3). The introduction of the Connexions Strategy and the role of the Connexions Personal Adviser represented early examples of this thinking. The experience of the PAs in my research, therefore, represents an important contribution to our understanding of how radical change impacts on the professional identities of those involved.

Writing about one's research, however, is an essentially retrospective task involving the representation of participants' views gathered at some time in the past. My thesis has been set within a framework of constant and ongoing change and my model of the process of identity exploration and evolution is dynamic, iterative and continuously moving forwards. It assumes that identity stability is not and cannot be permanent. Rather it will be forever shifting and needing to be re-negotiated as the discourses surrounding practice evolve. In chapter 4, I referred to the work of Said (1978) whose philosophy of 'beginnings' helped me to contextualise some of my own confusions. Said maintained that 'beginning' implies 'return and repetition', where the work of reflection and iteration are part of the sustained activity and any starting point 'places the project in relation to all that has gone before'. 'Beginning again' gives direction to whatever follows.

Since the data for this research were gathered, there have been a number of further policy developments which will have impacted on the roles and identities of the practitioners involved. My aim in this final chapter is to provide a brief overview of that policy and some indication of what it might mean for the future roles of those working with children and young people. Again, it is not my intention here to critique that policy or to provide an evaluation of how it is being introduced. I have no original data from practitioners in relation to this more recent policy, so I present this summary of it as a post-script to my own data and analysis.



As I noted in chapter 2, the Laming (2003) enquiry set up to investigate the death of Victoria Climbié, made a series of recommendations that led to the publication of the Green Paper 'Every Child Matters' (DfES, 2003a). Laming concluded that children's needs were being neglected or overlooked through a lack of 'joined-up' working, poor systems for information sharing and too great a reliance on professional and agency boundaries. Hence, the 'Every Child Matters' Green Paper was characterised by calls for the creation of new services and new working practices that emphasise the integration of services through multi-agency working and partnerships between the voluntary, community and statutory sectors including common assessments, information sharing and joint training. What has since become known as the 'Every Child Matters agenda' has led to a comprehensive and radical review of approaches to the delivery of all children's and young people's services – not only those coming under the remit of Connexions. This policy framework has led to a period of confusion, uncertainty and instability for all practitioners working with children and young people. At the time of writing this uncertainty is far from being resolved.

'Every Child Matters' (DfES, 2003a) led to the setting up of a new Children, Young People and Families Directorate within the DfES and the introduction of a new ministerial post with responsibility for driving through the changes recommended in 'Every Child Matters'. The Connexions Service National Unit (CSNU) was subsumed within this new Directorate and the Connexions Strategy, as a consequence, became a part of this wider imperative. Every Child Matters was followed, very swiftly, by the passing of The Children Act (2004) which introduced the necessary legislation to establish Children's Trusts in every local authority by 2008. Children's Trusts are described as 'strategic partnerships set up to look at the direction of children's services in local authorities and to prompt development of the integrated services agenda' (ECOTEC, 2006). All local authorities had to have published their plans for introducing Children's Trusts by April 2006 and so, although still in the early stages of development, this consequent re-structuring of local authority services for children and young people is now well underway.

'Every Child Matters' also argued for the introduction of a Common Core of Skills and Knowledge (DfES, 2005e) for the children's workforce; the development of an 'Integrated Qualifications Framework' that would facilitate more flexible career progression between professional roles; and the identification of what it called a 'lead professional', described as 'one practitioner who will take a lead role to ensure that



front-line services are co-ordinated, coherent and achieving intended outcomes' (DfES 2006a). Thus, a large part of the remit of the Children, Young People and Families Directorate since 2003 has been working towards the radical proposals for workforce reform which were eventually published in April 2005 (DfES, 2005a)

The Children's Workforce Strategy sets out a vision of a 'competent, confident and stable' workforce that would 'overcome the restrictive impact of professional and organisational boundaries'. It aims to achieve this through 'stimulating new ways of working and the development of new roles' and through the introduction of a single qualifications framework built around the 'common core of skills and knowledge'. In September 2006, responsibility for developing the workforce reforms and Integrated Qualifications Framework was given to the fledgling Children's Workforce Development Council who are responding to this task with impressive, if not alarming, speed. The role and training route for the integrated Early Years Professional is already operational and it is anticipated that a similar 'integrated' role for the rest of the children and young people's workforce will be in place by 2008.

With all services for children and young people coming increasingly under the spotlight with the publication of 'Every Child Matters' (DfES, 2003a), a number of commentators had begun to question the continuing role of the Connexions Service. In addition, a number of research reports had stimulated speculation about the contents of a promised Green Paper on Youth. In 2003 research by the Institute of Public Policy Research (Edwards and Hatch, 2003) criticised Connexions for its emphasis on 'education and work goals' at the expense of 'social and emotional support' and proposed revising the role of Connexions PA into the 'new profession' of 'social educator' combining youth and community work, social work, adolescent mental health services and careers services 'to provide more holistic services for young people'. Research by Hoggarth and Smith (2004) concluded that Connexions looked 'more like two services than one', that the holistic role of the Personal Adviser was 'unsustainable and that Connexions was not adequately resourced to meet the needs of both universal and targeted youth provision. An 'End to End Review Of Careers Education and Guidance' (DfES, 2005c) raised concerns about the quality of general and specialised careers advice offered through Connexions and concluded that there were 'significant flaws in the current arrangements' which made them 'not sustainable in today's education and economic environment or in the face of the challenges of the next few years'.



This continued questioning became a source of considerable uncertainty for all those working in Connexions. Smith (2005) has suggested that the persistence of this uncertainty might have been due to Connexions lacking 'strong support from the top among senior ministers. Whatever the reason, this uncertainty was not helped by a period of rumour, speculation and successive delays which Smith (2005) claimed to have been caused by departmental disagreement, ministerial power struggles, spending reviews and eventually the General Election and subsequent Cabinet reshuffles. The promised Green Paper, about the future of services for young people within the new Children's Trusts, finally saw the light of day in July 2005. The delays and rumours surrounding 'Youth Matters' (DfES, 2005d) led to what has been described as 'planning blight' (Goddard, 2005) and to considerable difficulties keeping the workforce motivated, especially because the potential break up of Connexions had been so heavily rumoured.

'Youth Matters' (DfES, 2005d) concluded that existing services 'do not amount to a coherent, modern system of support' for young people, and that they 'do not work together as effectively or imaginatively as they should'. In line with the thinking of 'Every Child Matters' it proposed a single, integrated youth support service and stated that the service most likely to be affected by these reforms would be Connexions (p.10). It proposed that the funding that currently goes directly to each of the 47 Connexions partnerships should, by 2008, go to each of the 150 local authority areas. Following a period of consultation, 'Youth Matters: Next Steps' (DfES, 2006b.28) acknowledged that the 'transition of Connexions to the new system will be an important factor in achieving change', but remained adamant that Connexions will move into the Children's Trusts. However, it also proposed that the 'Connexions brand' will be retained 'as the public face of the Children's Trust in action'.

'Youth Matters' (DfES, 2005d) recognised that 'transition to the new system may create uncertainty ... at local level' (p.69). A study (ECOTEC, 2006) commissioned by the DfES to 'explore and evaluate the key issues emerging in moving the delivery of Connexions towards Children's Trust processes' reported in September 2006 that the most common of these issues were 'to do with the workforce'.

'Some Connexions staff were said to be resisting change and were even in denial of what the transition actually meant. The lack of an adequate communication process also created uncertainty, which had a knock-on effect



on recruitment and retention. This was more so in areas where communication was being fed through to staff slowly, and in a piecemeal fashion, rather than managed properly.' (ECOTEC, 2006: 6)

'Youth Matters' (DfES, 2005d) also promised that schools and colleges would be given more freedom to commission Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) services directly where 'they believe existing provision is poor'. It remains unclear, however, what this will mean in practice. 'Youth Matters: Next Steps' (DfES, 2006b) promised to continue to 'work towards an integrated service that preserves and develops young people's access to a rich variety of sources and channels for Information, Advice and Guidance' (p.21). It also promised to develop 'quality standards' for information, advice and guidance covering the 'full range' of issues on which young people might seek advice and guidance, 'not just careers and learning' (p.22). At the time of writing the draft 'quality standards' are already 2 months overdue. However, in December 2006, a report in *Young People Now* magazine (Rogers and Goddard, 2006) indicated that the forthcoming draft quality standards for information, advice and guidance will emphasise the importance of maintaining a holistic approach to advice and guidance.

'Youth Matters: Next Steps' (2006b:30) continues to insist that, 'the skills of the Connexions workforce will be essential in providing expertise in a range of areas including delivering IAG and targeted support'. However, at the time of writing it remains unclear what the future professional roles within the new Integrated Children's Trusts will be. At least one local authority, however, has embarked on plans to integrate its children and young people's workforce into teams of 'generic children's workers' (Rogers, 2006). These new 'generic' workers, it is claimed, will deliver 'both universal and targeted services including youth provision, alongside other services including social care, education, welfare and parenting support'. Furthermore, yet more plans are in the pipe line. The Treasury and the DfES are currently working on a 'wider review' of services for children and young people, which includes a 'sub-review of youth services' (Lloyd, 2006). This is expected to be ready early in 2007. We may therefore expect a continuing context of change, uncertainty and confusion for practitioners working in children and young people's services for some time to come



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**APPENDICES**



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## Letter To Research Participants

8<sup>th</sup> March 2004

Dear

### Being Connexions

I am writing to ask you for your help with my doctoral research. I have enclosed a questionnaire that I very much hope you will feel able, willing (and interested enough) to complete.

The field of working with young people is changing at such a rapid rate that there is a need to understand not only the nature of that change, but also how it impacts on professional work and the identities adopted by particular individuals and groups. This is the issue that I am investigating in the hope that any findings will lead us to some insight into how to manage this ongoing change process that we find ourselves involved in.

My own interest in this area of inquiry has emerged through the process of working with you and your colleagues on the Understanding Connexions and Diploma for Connexions Personal Advisers training programmes. I would very much like to continue exploring these themes with you by inviting you to complete and return my questionnaire.

I have enclosed an information sheet setting out the aims of the research and the confidentiality arrangements. I am also asking for your consent to be followed up as part of a smaller sample to take part in a one-to-one interview with me. If you would be willing to be included in this smaller sample I would be grateful if you would sign and return the consent form at the end of the questionnaire.

If you get bored half way through completing the questionnaire, please do still return it as there is likely to be some valuable data in however much you are able to complete. I have enclosed a pre-paid envelope for you to post it back to me. I look forward to receiving it.

With many thanks



## Information for Participants

A consistent theme to have emerged from issues raised by participants on the Understanding Connexions module and the Diploma for Connexions Personal Advisers since July 2001, has been one of confusion surrounding questions such as 'Who and what is Connexions?' and 'Who and what is a Personal Adviser?'

Tucker (2004) has suggested that the field of working with young people is changing at such a rapid rate that there is a need to understand not only the nature of that change but also how it impacts on professional work and the identities adopted by particular individuals and groups. It is this issue that I am currently investigating as part of my doctoral research with particular reference to those working within the Connexions framework. I hope that this will lead us to some insight into how to manage this ongoing change process that we find ourselves involved in.

My interest in this area of research has emerged through the process of working with you and your colleagues on the Understanding Connexions and Diploma for Connexions Personal Advisers training programmes, and through 'data' that you have generated as a result of participating on those programmes. I would like, therefore, to continue our joint exploration by inviting you to complete and return the attached questionnaire.

The open-ended nature of this questionnaire seeks to elicit your views and thoughts in so far as you are able to articulate them. However, questionnaires do have a number of limitations in terms of depth. I would, therefore, also like to follow up a small number of participants, who respond to the questionnaire, and invite them to take part in a more in-depth one-to-one interview with me. These interviews will probably last for about an hour and will be conducted at a time and place where those involved feel comfortable. The aim of the interview is to give participants an opportunity to elaborate on some of the ideas and themes raised in the questionnaires. If you would be willing to be included in this smaller sample I would be grateful if you would sign the consent form at the end of the questionnaire.

**A consent form is not a contract and you are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time in the research process.**

Any responses you make on the questionnaire or in an interview will be confidential between yourself and me. Neither you, nor your employer/organisation will be identified in the analysis. All data collected will be stored and coded by me such that you and your responses cannot be identified by anyone else. If you are asked to participate in an interview I will again outline consent and confidentiality arrangements and ask for your permission to audio-tape the interview. It is up to you whether you agree and again you are free to withdraw your consent at any time.

I have enclosed a post-paid envelope for the return of your questionnaire. I am aware how busy your lives and work can be and should you only feel able to complete part of the questionnaire, that would be fine. **Please return it regardless of whether you completed all the sections, since any response is better than none!**

If you agree to participate I would be grateful if you could return it to me by **26<sup>th</sup> April**  
If you have any questions at any stage please feel free to ask them

With many thanks

*Billie Oliver*



**BEST COPY**

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**Being Connexions**

Thank you for agreeing to complete this questionnaire. Your responses will be treated confidentially and reviewed only by Billie Oliver. You and your organisation will not be identified in any way in the analysis. Please answer as many questions as you think are relevant to you. Please return the questionnaire **EVEN IF YOU DON'T COMPLETE ALL OF IT** since some response is better than none! When you have completed all that you can please return it to me in the post paid envelope enclosed by 26<sup>th</sup> April

**A: ABOUT YOU.**

1. Are you:	(please circle as appropriate)	MALE	FEMALE
2. Are you aged:	(circle as appropriate)	18 - 25	26 - 35      36 - 45      over 45
3. What is your job title?			
4. In which Connexions Partnership do you work?			
5. Please list any professional qualifications you have gained	within the last 5 years		
	5 - 10 years ago		
	10 - 15 years ago		
	over 15 years ago		



<p>6. Has your job title or occupation changed since the introduction of Connexions?</p>	<p>(circle as appropriate)</p>	<p>YES</p>	<p>NO</p>
<p>If NO, please go to question 8</p>			
<p>7. If you answered YES to question 6, What was your previous job title or occupation?</p>			
<p>How long were you in that previous occupation?</p>			

<p>8. In what month/year did you complete the Understanding Connexions and/or Diploma training?</p>	<p>Understanding Connexions</p> <p>..... (start month/year) ..... (end month/year)</p> <p>Diploma:</p> <p>..... (start month/year) ..... (end month/year)</p>
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**B: ABOUT YOU AND THE PEOPLE YOU WORK WITH**

<p>9. In your current role, where do you <u>mainly</u> carry out your work? (eg. in a school, in a drop in centre, in a youth centre)</p> <p>please answer Qs 10 - 17 with reference to this setting</p>	
<p>10. In this setting, what do you think the majority of the young people you work with understand the purpose of your role to be?</p>	

Page 3



<p>11. How do you think the young people you work with formed their expectations of you?</p>	
<p>12. Of the young people you work with, what proportion, would you say, have expectations of you that <u>match</u> the understanding you have of your role?</p>	<p>(please circle your answer)</p> <p>100%      over 75%      50 - 70%      30 - 50%      less than 25%</p>
<p>13. In what ways, if any, does their expectation of you affect your work with them?</p>	

<p>14. What do you think the majority of the other professionals that you work with understand the purpose of your role to be?</p>	
<p>15. How do you think the other professionals that you work with formed their expectations of you?</p>	
<p>16. Of the other professionals that you work with, what proportion, would you say, have expectations of you that <u>match</u> the understanding you have of your role?</p>	<p>(please circle your answer)</p> <p>100%      over 75%      50 - 70%      30 - 50%      less than 25%</p>



17. In what ways, if any, does their expectation of you affect your work with them?

18. Do you work in any other settings that are different to the one you described in Question 9?

If NO, please go to Question 20  
If YES, please explain

19. Comparing the main setting you described in Q9, with the one outlined in Q18 - please explain any significant differences you perceive in the expectations young people or others have of you and your role?

(please circle as appropriate)

YES (please explain)

NO

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C: ABOUT YOU & YOUR ROLE AT WORK

20. What is your perception of how your manager defines your role?

499-201. 3



<p>21. Does this fit with the way that you understand your role?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">If YES, please go to question 22</p> <p>If NO, in what ways, if any, does this affect the way that you carry out your work?</p>	<p>(please circle)</p> <p>YES</p> <p>NO</p>
<p>22. Do you feel that your job description matches what you actually do?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">If YES, please go to question 23</p> <p>If NO please briefly explain your answer.</p>	<p>(please circle)</p> <p>YES</p> <p>NO</p>
<p>23. Do you feel that your job description reflects the expectations others have of you?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">If YES, please go to question 24</p> <p>If NO, please briefly explain your answer.</p>	<p>(please circle)</p> <p>YES</p> <p>NO</p>



**D: ABOUT YOU AND YOUR PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY**

	(please circle)	YES	NO
24. Do you feel that you have a group of colleagues with whom you can talk about your work <u>and</u> who will understand what you are talking about?			If NO, please go to question 28
25. If YES, how big would you say this group was?			
26. Are there any defining characteristics to this group that you can identify? What is it about this group that enables you to feel comfortable talking about your work with them?			
27. Beyond this group, to what extent do you feel that you can talk about your work and be understood?			
28. Can you think of any reasons for this?			



<p>29. When you are asked 'what do you do for a living?' What do you usually say?</p>	
	<p>30. Would your answer be different depending on who you were talking to?  WHY?</p>

NO

YES

(circle your answer)

please explain your answer

<p>31. Do you think of yourself as having a 'professional identity'?</p>	
	<p>32. Do you consider your 'professional identity' to have ever been changed or challenged?</p>

NO

YES

(circle your answer)

please explain your answer

NO

YES

(circle your answer)

please explain your answer



33. In what ways do you feel either happy or unhappy with your current professional identity?

34. What impact (if any) did the Diploma or Understanding Connexions training have on your professional identity?

35. What do you think are the main factors affecting how a 'professional identity' is acquired or changed?

Thank you very much for your help. Your responses are confidential and will not be attributed to you or your organisation in any way.

Please return this questionnaire EVEN IF YOU HAVEN'T COMPLETED ALL OF IT in the post-paid envelope by 26<sup>th</sup> April

I would like to be able to follow up a smaller number of people for a more in-depth interview. If you would be willing to be interviewed I would be grateful if you would give your name and contact details on the next page which will be detached and kept separate from your questionnaire responses. Any views you share with me will remain anonymous and confidential and you will not be identified in any way in the write up of the research



## **Being Connexions**

If you would be willing to be interviewed I would be grateful if you would give your name and contact details which will be detached and kept separate from your questionnaire responses. Any views you share with me will remain anonymous and confidential and you will not be identified in any way in the write up of the research.

**I would be willing to participate in a follow up interview with Billie Oliver**

(Signature)

Print Name:

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Contact address:

Contact email: (please print clearly)

Contact phone number:

If you wish for this questionnaire to remain anonymous but would still like to participate in an interview you can email me on [Billie.Oliver@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:Billie.Oliver@uwe.ac.uk) to let me know rather than completing your details here.

150.1.3



code	Q. 13. Expectation affect work with YP	Q. 14. Others expect?	Q. 15. Based on?	Q. 16 match	Q.17 Others expectation affect work with YP	Q. 18 Other settings
36 f ca	Being client centred I was trying to respond to a wide range of their needs	Careers adviser, social worker, someone who could fix all problems in 1 hr interviews. Last resort referrals.	National publicity	30-50%	Often unable to fulfil their expectations much time spent trying to clarify my role	NO
49 f ca	A strong focus on ETE	ETE	My explanation of role & experience in working with PAs	75%+	Strong focus on ETE	Visit YP in secure unit
45 m yw	Keeps me on my toes and keen for my work	Not sure they want to know. Always want to put Connexions down. They expect me to do 'all that Connexions stuff' and not good at Youth Work	They have their own views of Connexions – formed at birth of Connexions	75%+	I have to work in a Youth Service doing their work with YP at risk of exclusion – yet not made to feel valued	NO
37 f sw	Always trying to look what is behind the issue but they want a job/college even when they are not ready for it. They see us as careers/job centre	Careers	Grasped bits from here and there. Mainly once they have worked with a PA	30-50%	No answer	YES Not explained
39 f ca	N A	Very varied – sometimes as a last ditch attempt when all else has failed. A counselling service. Things are becoming clearer slowly. <b>Where</b> there are good partnerships the message about education, employment & training is clearer That I can solve ALL issues	Government marketing. Networking put out by partnerships. Joint working	50-70%	Sometimes feel pressurised to take inappropriate referrals	Home Visits
51 f ca	They may be disappointed that I cannot get them a flat, find them a dream job		From experiences word of mouth, advertising in media, managers promoting our service	- 25%	They are frustrated we cannot help in the ways they think we can	Cafes, clients homes
43 f yw	In most ways I work I OK them in a sense. I help them realise what they want	similar	I share my ideas & practices as much as I can	75%+	My priority is the YP & their expectations	NO



code	Q27. Beyond group understood?	Q28. Reasons	Q29. Describe job how	Q30. Differences	Q31. Identity	Q. 31 Explain
39 f ca	Generally I would say a significant percentage, however there are a number of different posts – key workers, buddies and this can muddy the waters	Generally I would say a significant percentage, however there are a number of different posts – key workers, buddies and this can muddy the waters	Connexions Personal Adviser. As this doesn't exist when applying for a mortgage I have gone for Youth Worker	YES – depends whether they have heard of Cx before, otherwise largely no	YES	N/A
51 f ca	Not at all really	No understanding of pressures; lack of provision; different values	Connexions Personal Adviser when person looks blank I say Careers Adviser but I deal with other issues as well	YES – other professionals that have had contact with Connexions PA ie SW	YES	N/A
44 f yw	I can talk to EWOs about YW or vice versa. I can also talk to PAs & often talk to PA in my school	Because she also feels some of the pressure of working within a school without being a teacher/being employed by the school – although neither of us believe we could do our jobs properly if we were employed by the school	EWO old truancy officer	NO - I find it easy to explain & it usually causes a lively debate!	YES	It feels like I have a set role with set boundaries that give me an identity
41 f sw	I don't	New role created that no one else has experienced. Others (including Cans staff) all have differing expectations of us	Social Worker	NO No one understands what a PA is	YES	As a Social Worker
59 f sw	I can usually explain my role well within context of leaving care & social services, but Connexions is more difficult to explain	Connexions is new and the function is less easy to define Whereas I can explain leaving care services with reference to legislation, research etc. I don't have a similar knowledge base for Connexions	I work with young people	YES I'd be more specific with other professionals as they would be more familiar with the service	YES	Not a strong one but primarily it would be as a social worker – not as a PA
58 f sw	Not that much	My work is very specific to a small client group Others would see this as a small group and <b>not</b> have time to get involved	Personal Adviser for YP with a hearing loss	YES for bureaucratic purposes I would just say Personal Educational Adviser	YES	Referrals are appropriate to my role This suggests other professionals understand what I do



code	Q27. Beyond groupunderstood?	Q28. Reasons	Q29. Describe job how	Q30. Differences	Q31. Identity	Q31. Explain
225 f ca	Not very	I choose to talk to people whose approach is more similar to mine	Support teenagers & help them back into ETE	Yes - with another professional in same kind of field I would mention Connexions & use title personal adviser.	YES	Within the network I work in but not necessarily wider than that as the job title doesn't really mean much to other people
234 f ca	n/a	n/a	Trg coordinator	no	yes	Apart from my manager I am the only person with an overall knowledge of training events
237 m ca			manager	YES - careers adviser	YES	Careers adviser
242 f ca		Only the ones who were careers advisers in the past	Careers Advisor	YES - would use PA (careers) at work	NO	Only as a careers adviser not as a PA
245 m hsg	Very limited	Lack of understanding	Support worker	NO	NO	Job title means very little outside our organisation
248 f ca	To managers with history in careers service	Shared backgrounds & understanding & appreciation of my role as a careers advisor	Careers Advisor	YES - some managers would expect me to say Cx PA	YES	I have a professional qualification, a number of years experience & feel valued & respected for my work by staff and students
250 f ca	To a certain extent		Student support officer	No I am proud of what I do	YES	I have undertaken a number of professional qualifications in recent years and work within professional boundaries
256 f yw	Can talk about my work in supervision and be understood	Supervision is quite structured and has great emphasis on work meeting targets	A cross between youth work, social work with an emphasis on education training	Yes - would explain it in a different way to a YP so they understand	Yes and no	Yes with colleagues and other agencies. No to YP
188 f ca		Mimes a one off role	Careers advisor in a college	No	Yes	Although I have been a CA in a range of settings the skills and knowledge are transferable



## Extracts from 'Quotes' spreadsheet

Question	Quote	Person
<b>Q26. Are there any defining characteristics to this group that you can identify? What is it that enables you to feel comfortable talking about work to them?</b>	<i>They view yp similar to me &amp; appreciate you need to be consistent, upfront and understanding to make effective working relations. They also are very flexible in their way of working with yp.</i>	PA5 f-yw 5+
	<i>Same aims in relation to young people even though our roles are different. Mutual respect for roles Trusting good communication established</i>	PA13 f-ewo 15+
	<i>Don't feel I'll be judges/viewed as incompetent We share similar concerns anxieties about our work</i>	PA21 f-ed 5+
	<i>Similar frustrations. Unfamiliarity with the context they are working in. Hope that Connexions can succeed Unbelieving about the poor management and supervision and powerless</i>	PA95 f-ca 15+
	<i>Same job role, similar friendly approachable manner with like minded issues, successes and frustrations as myself The unity of the often confusing role brings you to a mutual understanding.</i>	PA97 f-ca 5+
	<i>They are experienced in working with young people and are able to empathise when I discuss problems I am experiencing</i>	PA121 f-ca 5+
	<i>They are trustworthy &amp; help problem solve without putting my work &amp; efforts down.</i>	PA128 f-yw 5+
	<i>There is inevitably a lot of tension between PAs trained in different professions – our management has exacerbated this</i>	PA144 f-ca 5+
	<i>Mostly they are staff who were employed by the former careers service and therefore understand what has been lost as well as gained by the change to Connexions</i>	PA160 m-ca 5+
	<i>All the group have completed the same professional training (pre-entry) and are in similar roles</i>	PA155 m-ca 5+
	<i>All share same concerns &amp; frustrations We face same difficulties on a day to day basis &amp; realise the need to act as a support mechanism for each other. Work situation can be very stressful as reflected in long term sickness of a colleague due to stress.</i>	PA260 f-ca 15+
	<i>Deliver service from same base, same role, same expectations; same line management</i>	PA208 f-sw 5+
	<i>Members feel confident to speak openly about current issues as no team leaders present. All have shared negative experiences whereas team leaders are detached from reality</i>	PA206 f-ca 5+
	<i>People who I feel have a similar level of commitment to helping young people overcome problems and use similar approaches. I choose to talk to people whose approach is similar to mine</i>	PA225 f-ca 5+
<b>Q31. Do you have a professional identity?</b>	<i>Yes – this develops from belief in what you do and day to day practice. It evolves and develops</i>	PA13 f-ewo 15+
	<i>Yes but only because I still see myself as a social worker I don't feel I have an identity as a PA</i>	PA28 f-sw 5+
	<i>My identity was stripped from me when I started at Cxns</i>	PA37 f-sw 10+



	<i>Not sure. I used to – very much so!</i>	PA70 f-ca 5+
	<i>Yes – I have a professional qualification and represent a particular service in my work (SW)</i>	PA84 m-sw 5+
	<i>Yes – my qualifications entitle me to this – also my clients may depend on my judgement as a professional</i>	PA71 m-yw 5+
	<i>This is difficult. I still think of myself as teacher (educational identity?) I sit in a no man's land Connexions is not a profession. It is a group of different sorts of professionals</i>	PA93 f-ed 15+
	<i>If I had a professional identity I would not have to continue to explain Cx or a PA is or what we do. A teacher social worker or nurse don't have to explain their role because it is well defined – people know what they do and don't do – and it doesn't change from one environment to another</i>	PA103 f-yw 5+
	<i>No- I hoped to be part of the team in the way speech therapists, physios are – no one tried to make them into social workers</i>	PA95 f-ca 15+
	<i>Yes to those who understand No to those who don't</i>	PA107 m-ca 5+
	<i>If you spoke to a representative sample of the population all could probably give you a fairly decent answer to the questions: what does a teacher/doctor/social worker do? But they probably wouldn't do the same if you asked them what a youth worker does. So yes I think I'm professional but no I don't think of myself as having a professional identity</i>	PA114 m-yw 5+
	<i>Yes I have undertaken training as a postgraduate for a year to get the Diploma &amp; Qualification in careers guidance</i>	PA111 f-ca 5+
	<i>No – few people have heard of Connexions &amp; PA is associated with Personal Assistant</i>	PA121 f-ca 5+
	<i>Yes – I see myself as having a specific mix of health, careers and general guidance skills and developing skills as a reflective practitioner</i>	PA132 f-ca 5+
	<i>I currently do not feel that I have a professional identity I am required to be a 'jack of all trades' and by implication a 'master of none'. I find it demeaning that someone with my professional qualifications is not regarded as a fully qualified within the Connexions framework until I undertake the Diploma training – a quasi 'qualification' designed to indoctrinate not educate. Meanwhile the company continues to recruit well meaning amateurs with NVQ 3s and to the clients there is no distinction between them and me. There certainly has been a serious erosion of professional standards, as they are allowed to practise regardless.</i>	PA138 f-ca 5+
	<i>Not any more. I did as a careers adviser</i>	PA144 f-ca 5+
	<i>YES – I am a careers adviser – I belong to an institute have letters after my name and my position requires this at pre-entry</i>	PA155 m-ca 5+
	<i>I used to be a careers adviser. I feel that careers adviser is my identity as this is what I am trained for &amp; also people understand what that is &amp; by adding the extension to my role (PA) this gives a flavour of what else I can do</i>	PA260 f-ca 15+
	<i>I see social workers as having professional identity because of the extra training/qualifications</i>	PA208 f-sw 5+
	<i>YES – as Careers Adviser. Most people are aware of who a careers adviser is and what they do</i>	PA218 m-ca 15+



	<i>Not now. I did prior to Connexions I do feel that the profession of Careers Adviser has been seriously undermined by Connexions policy</i>	PA189 f-ca 10+
	<i>It is muddled. I felt much clearer as a careers adviser with a clear remit/focus. Young people understood better too</i>	PA197 m-ca 15+
	<i>My professional identity is still as a Careers Adviser. Do not feel professional identity as a PA</i>	PA204 f-ca 15+
	<i>Yes but only within the network I work in. The job title doesn't really mean much to other people</i>	PA225 f-ca 5+
	<i>YES - I have a professional qualification, a number of years of experience and feel valued and respected for my work by staff and students in schools</i>	PA248 f-ca 15+
	<i>I feel I have an identity as a careers adviser but not as a PA - feel the role is too broad sometimes to have any professional clout</i>	PA216 f-ca 5+
	<i>Yes - this is more about my own professional code of conduct - developed through other professional work and experience rather than Connexions</i>	PA266 f-sw 5+
<b>Q33. In what ways are you happy/unhappy with professional identity?</b>	<i>I'm very happy and am confident enough to explain and justify my role and work</i>	PA5 f-yw 5+
	<i>Happy but it needs reinforcement from managers and peers</i>	PA13 f-ewo 15+
	<i>Unhappy that my skills now seem to be focusing on meeting targets and completing paperwork</i>	PA26 f-ed 15+
	<i>The service is trying to do too much. We are essentially the careers service who have become confused</i>	PA97 f-ca 5+
	<i>Connexions as a service has some identity because of marketing &amp; I have some unease about being identified with it</i>	PA29 m-ca 10+
	<i>I'm unhappy. I feel de-skilled. I have lost many skills and feel due to the expectations of the all encompassing PA I do not see how I can have an identity</i>	PA37 f-sw 10+
	<i>Unhappy that my background as a Careers Adviser seems undervalued in the new Cx service and I feel de-skilled and less effective in my new role. Happier in that my work is more interesting and varied.</i>	PA24 f-ca 10+
	<i>I prefer to be known as careers adviser, people understand it and valued it - saw me as offering professional specialist advice</i>	PA70 f-ca 5+
	<i>Happy in the way I am clear as to my professional identity. Unhappy the way it is promoted by senior/area managers</i>	PA75 m-yw 5+
	<i>People, particularly the general public, do not know what a 'Personal Adviser' is. I am forever explaining</i>	PA108 m-ca 5+
	<i>There is little opportunity for sharing professional knowledge within the organisation</i>	PA93 f-ed 15+
	<i>I feel happy that in some ways I have been able to develop my own professional identity by having some freedom in deciding how I will meet the Cx objectives. At the same time I feel unhappy that unclear job/roles/descriptions and</i>	PA103 f-yw 5+



	inconsistencies in what we do in our various settings has made us look like we don't know who we are or what we do	
	Unhappy - lots of cynicism towards Connexions constant, having to prove myself	PA107 m-ca 5+
	I feel fine about it. The job would be easier if all schools/colleges accepted & understood the role but that takes time & good working relations	PA107 f-ca 5+
	As I am now universal & intensive I feel happy to be described as a Personal Adviser	PA111 f-ca 5+
	I feel the job my boss and I have designed for me works very well - apart from the job title	PA117 f-ed 15+
	Unhappy about the new government expectations & the increased work load - we'll soon be social teachers with league tables	PA128 f-yw 5+
	Unhappy about resourcing - have been short staffed for over a year. This undermines my own expectations of standards in my professional identity	PA132 f-ca 5+
	I'm not only unhappy but seriously frustrated I am good at my job but increasingly I feel I have to leave the service for my own sanity. I think it is obvious to everyone on the ground how this service could work better - only we are not asked	PA144 f-ca 5+
	I am unhappy that I no longer do much of the work I have trained for and have expertise in. I feel my role is very fudged now & I am often dealing with issues for which I have not been properly trained. I worry sometimes that I might do more harm than good	PA171 ca 5+
	We need other agencies to understand our role better - some show respect but not others	PA208 f-sw 5+
	Concerned that some specialisms could be lost	PA206 f-ca 5+
	I feel lucky that I have had the opportunity to retain my careers guidance identity by moving to the college	PA188 f-ca 10+
	Don't like being looked on as just careers. Don't like young people looking at me and expecting me to treat them 'like a teacher' as they would say. I miss the more informal sessions I'm used to.	PA192 f-yw 15+
	I'm worried about the future of Connexions. We are overstretched by partners' expectations. I feel I will spend a lot of time outlining realistically what we can do	PA197 m-ca 15+
	I would prefer a professional identity that was capable of conveying more understanding to people in general. However, keeping it more general can have its advantages for young people who may feel less stigmatised coming forward to a wide umbrella type professional	PA225 f-ca 5+
	I feel happy in school - my identity is intact! I feel demoralised by Connexions	PA182 f-ca 5+
	Very unhappy. Only feel comfortable in my role as Careers Adviser	PA176 f-ca 5+
	Unhappy - too closely allied to social work, youth work and similar professions with too much masking of careers adviser identity	PA237 m-ca 5+
	Happy with my personal professional identity however unhappy with the lack of clarity, consistency and approach to practice around in Cx.	PA263 f-sw 5+



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## Information for Interview Participants

Tucker (2004) has suggested that the field of working with young people is changing at such a rapid rate that there is a need to understand not only the nature of that change, but also how it impacts on professional work and the identities adopted by particular individuals and groups. It is this issue that I am currently investigating as part of my doctoral research with particular reference to those working within the Connexions framework. I hope that this will lead us to some insight into how to manage this ongoing change process that we find ourselves involved in. My interest in this area of research has emerged through the process of working with you and your colleagues on the Understanding Connexions and Diploma for Connexions Personal Advisers training programmes, and through 'data' that you have generated as a result of participating on those programmes.

I was also especially interested in some of the responses that you made on the questionnaire you completed and I would like to continue our joint exploration by inviting you to take part in an interview with me.

The interview will last for about an hour and will be conducted at a time and place that suits you. The aim of the interview is to give you an opportunity to elaborate on some of the ideas and themes raised in your responses to the questionnaire. You indicated on the questionnaire that you would be willing to be interviewed and I am hoping that this is still the case. **However, your consent at that time was not a contract and you are free to withdraw it now if you wish.**

**I would like to be able to audio-tape the interview.** This is so enable me to listen to the interview again and to validate the accuracy of my interpretation and analysis of what we discuss. However, it is up to you whether you agree to be taped. You are free to withdraw your consent at any time and ask for the tape recorder to be switched off. After the completion and submission of my thesis I will either wipe the tape clean or return it to you to dispose of (or keep). Anything that you say during the interview will be confidential between yourself and me. Neither you, nor your employer/organisation will be identified in the analysis. All data collected will be stored and coded by me such that you and your responses cannot be identified by anyone else

Soon after the interview, I will send you a narrative summary of how I have interpreted the content of our conversation. I will also send you a copy of the audio-tape and I will ask you to comment on my interpretation and seek your agreement on my understandings. This is in order to validate my interpretations and to ensure, where possible, that my own bias is not entering into the analysis.

I am very aware how busy you are and the pressures on your time, however. I very much hope that you will agree to find the time to participate in an interview with me. If you have any questions at any stage please feel free to ask them  
With many thanks

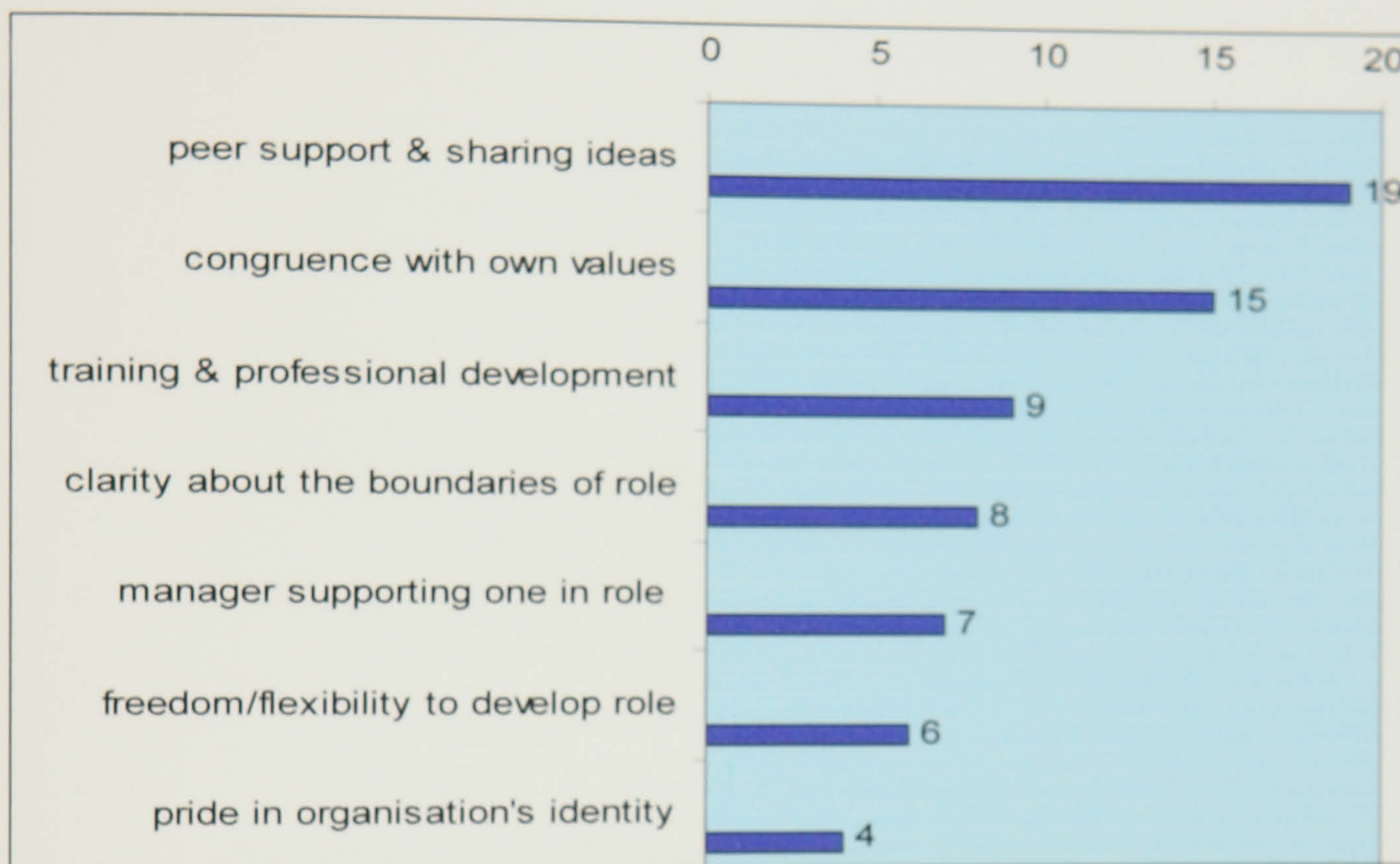
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**Analysis of Interview Responses**

Number of interviewees	11	'Professional' backgrounds:	
Male	4	Careers	5
Female	7	Youth Work	3
		Employment Service	2
		Social Work	1

**What helps to establish/shape a professional role identity?**



**What hinders change/adaptation of role identity?**

