

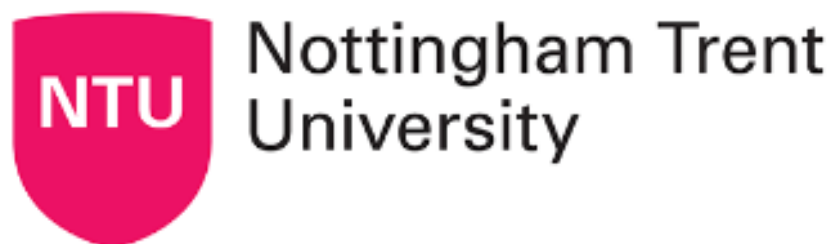
**AN EXPLORATION OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF ESTABLISHED STAFF  
MEMBERS THAT BECOME APPRENTICES**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Nottingham Trent  
University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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### **Acknowledgements**

Thank you to Professor Rowena Hill, and Dr Ruth Richards for their fantastic supervisory support. Their dedication and professionalism were exemplary; their challenge and motivation throughout was measured and provided the perfect scaffold to enable the researcher to learn, achieve, and remain focused throughout this study.

### **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to the researcher's amazing wife and children, and to his parents, in-particular to his father who always wanted his son to achieve a PhD.

## **Abstract**

The apprenticeship provision has been through one of the most extensive reforms in the post compulsory. Following the apprenticeship reforms, the government made a commitment to achieve 3 million apprenticeship starts by 2020. Consequentially, in England, there has been a significant increase in adult apprentices, in 2021/22, 76.3% of apprentices were aged 19 and over, and achievement rates of apprentices were low, 57.7% in 2020/21. Many of these adult apprentices were already employed and using an apprenticeship to upskill within their current occupation. Therefore, this research focuses on established staff members that become apprentices. Established staff members are defined as those who were already in employment before starting an apprenticeship.

The research objectives were formulated around theoretical concepts that were identified as pertinent to apprenticeships, namely, social identity theory; situated learning; and experiential learning. These concepts have provided the overarching theoretical framework for this thesis and were used to frame the research enquiry to achieve the objectives. This study was conducted using a qualitative approach over a twelve-month duration, this enabled a deeper insight into the lived experiences of the participants; the sample size was n=9. The participants were purposely selected from a range of occupations, levels, training providers, demographics, and geographical areas across England. Mixed methods were used to gather and validate the data, these included: semi-structured interviews, qualitative questionnaires, and focus groups; the suitability of which was determined through a pilot study in preparation for the main study.

The findings suggest that most of the participants' lived experiences were restrictive, with only one of the participants having an expansive lived experience as an existing staff member that enrolled on an apprenticeship. Furthermore, due to a limited understanding of apprenticeships within employment settings, and varying levels of pedagogical practice, most participants were unable to access their apprenticeship entitlements, and were experiencing issues related to their social identity during the apprenticeship journey. The study concludes with several recommendations for the UK Government, and employees to achieve their post-apprenticeship vision within an expansive apprenticeship journey. In addition, a new taxonomy is introduced, namely, 'the expansive continuum trigon,' this recognises the intrinsic link between social identity theory; situated learning; and experiential learning.

## List of Outputs

The following publications are either a direct consequence of the findings in this work or have led the enquiry of the research to explore aspects related to technical education including apprenticeships.

1. Coulson, B. 2021. The Skills for Jobs white paper: A chance to provide 'flexibility.' [Blog] Available at: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/the-skills-for-jobs-white-paper-a-chance-to-provide-flexibility>
2. Coulson, B. 2021. The Purpose of Education. [Blog] Available at: <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2021/07/23/the-purpose-of-education/>
3. Cole, D. and Coulson, B. 2022. Through and Beyond COVID-19, Promoting Whole Person, Lifelong and Lifewide Learning. Journal of Innovation in Polytechnic Education, 4(1), pp.45-50. Humber Press.
4. Coulson, B. 2022. What does the Higher Technical Kitemark really mean? [Blog] Available at: <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/what-does-the-higher-technical-kitemark-really-mean/>
5. Coulson, B. 2022. Higher Technical Education and Apprenticeships: Course Design Considerations. Employability and Skills Conference, Universities UK. 19 May 2022, online.
6. Coulson, B. 2022. Annual Conference. Colleges Meeting Higher Technical Skills Needs. Association of Colleges. 15 November 2022, ICC, Birmingham.
7. Brown, S., Coulson, B., Everson, J. 2023. A practical exploration of non-teaching leadership roles within the further education and skills sector (FES), in Outhwaite, D. (Ed), Simon, C, A. (Ed). 2023. Leadership and Management for Education Studies, Introducing Key Concepts of Theory and Practice. London: Routledge, chapter 13.
8. Coulson, B. 2023. Conference. The Future of Higher Technical Qualifications. Inside Government. 18 May 2023, Online.

## Contents

Copyright statement .....	1
Acknowledgements .....	2
Dedication .....	2
Abstract .....	3
List of Outputs .....	4
Contents.....	5
List of Figures .....	7
List of Tables.....	8
Appendices .....	9
Glossary of Abbreviations .....	9
Chapter One Introduction .....	10
1.1 What are Apprenticeships? .....	13
1.2 Context: Apprenticeship Reforms .....	15
1.3 Context: Apprenticeship Funding Rules .....	17
1.4 Research Aim .....	20
1.5 Research Objective Statements.....	20
1.6 Contribution to Knowledge Overview .....	21
Chapter Two Literature Review: Historical Context .....	23
2.1 Historical Context.....	23
2.2 Synopsis of Related Studies.....	27
Chapter Three Literature Review: Theoretical Concepts .....	37
3.1 Social Identity Theory .....	37
3.2 Situated learning.....	42
3.3 Experiential Learning .....	49
3.4 Literature Review Conclusion .....	53
3.5 Research Questions .....	58
Chapter Four Methodology .....	60
4.1 Philosophical Approach .....	60
4.2 Ethical Considerations.....	63
4.3 Research Methods .....	65
4.4 Reflective Diary .....	65
4.5 Semi-structured Interviews .....	67
4.6 Focus Groups.....	69
4.7 Qualitative Questionnaires.....	70
4.8 Pilot Study .....	72
4.9 Pilot Data Collection .....	73
4.10 Pilot Analysis .....	74

4.11 Pilot Study.....	75
4.12 Recommendations from Pilot Study .....	78
4.13 Research Design – Mapping .....	79
4.14 Philosophical Approach – Revised .....	85
4.15 Sample and Data Validity .....	86
4.16 Geographical Locations .....	87
4.17 Data Analysis.....	89
4.18 Methodology Conclusion .....	95
Chapter Five Findings .....	97
Phase One: Findings .....	97
Phase Two: Findings .....	137
Phase Three: Findings .....	159
Phase Three: Addendum semi-structured interview.....	184
Chapter Six Discussion .....	196
Phase One: Discussion .....	196
Phase Two: Discussion .....	202
Phase Three: Discussion .....	209
Expansive Continuum Trigon (Theoretical Model).....	222
Chapter Seven Conclusion .....	228
Summary of Contribution to Knowledge.....	237
Limitations of Study.....	240
Recommendations .....	240
Researcher’s Reflection .....	242
References.....	243
Appendices .....	257

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Apprenticeship Journey .....	14
Figure 1.1: Apprenticeships On-Programme .....	15
Figure 1.2: Structure of Thesis .....	22
Figure 2: Tajfel (1970) Social Identity Theory: Illustration .....	40
Figure 3: Situated Learning Model (Lave and Wenger, 1991).....	43
Figure 4: The expansive–restrictive continuum (Fuller and Unwin, 2003) .....	45
Figure 5: Experiential Learning Cycle, Kolb (1984) .....	49
Figure 6: Philosophical Approach – Initial Outline.....	63
Figure 7: Adapted version of Brookfield’s (1995) .....	73
Figure 8: An adapted version of Robson (2002) .....	80
Figure 9: Philosophical Approach – Revised .....	85
Figure 10: Sample – Geographical Locations .....	88
Figure 11: The Hermeneutic Circle as a Method of Interpretation .....	91
Figure 12: Illustration of the Main Stages of IPA .....	92
Figure 13: Tabular Example: Explanatory Notes and Experiential Statements ..	93
Figure 14: Tabular Example: Personal Experiential Themes .....	93
Figure 15: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: New Terminology .....	94
Figure 16: Expansive Continuum Trigon.....	223

## List of Tables

Table 1: Apprenticeship Levels (HM Government: Apprenticeships, 2022a) .....	13
Table 2: Apprenticeship Funding Rules 2022/23, Education Skills Funding Agency (2022) .....	19
Table 3: Key Themes and Links to Literature .....	54
Table 4: Contingent protocols – adapted from Janssens et al. (2018) .....	67
Table 5: Mapping Research Questions to method, and sampling timeline .....	81
Table 6: Sample: characteristics .....	87
Table 7 Phase One: Semi-Structured Interview, Group Experiential themes ....	98
Table 8 Phase One: Qualitative Questionnaire, Thematical Analysis .....	121
Table 9 Summary of Findings, Most Participants’ Experience (0-3 months)....	132
Table 10 Summary of findings, Some Participants’ experience (0-3 months) .	133
Table 11 Summary of findings, a few participants’ experience (0-3 months) .	134
Table 12: Month 3 participant retention rate .....	135
Table 13: Phase two, Focus group Themes.....	138
Table 14: Phase two: Questionnaire Themes .....	150
Table 15: Summary of Findings, Most Participants' Experience (3-6 months).	154
Table 16: Summary of Findings, Some Participants' Experience (3-6 months)	155
Table 17: Summary of Findings, A few Participants' Experience (3-6 months)	156
Table 18: Month 6 participant retention rate .....	157
Table 19: Phase Three: Semi-Structured Interview, Group Experiential themes .....	160
Table 20: Phase three: Focus Group.....	174
Table 21: Phase Three: Qualitative Questionnaire .....	178
Table 22: Phase Three: Addendum semi-structured interview, P7 .....	185
Table 23: Summary of Findings, Most Participants' Experience (6-12 months)	189
Table 24: Summary of Findings, Some Participants' Experience (6-12 months) .....	190
Table 25: Summary of Findings, A few Participants' Experience (6-12 months) .....	191
Table 26: Month 12 participant retention rate.....	192



## Appendices

Appendix One: Ethical Clearance Approval and Documentation

Appendix Two: Focus Group Schedules

Appendix Three: Padlet

Appendix Four: Pilot Study: Semi-Structured Questions

Appendix Five: Pilot Study: Research Materials

Appendix Six: Pilot Study: Findings

## Glossary of Abbreviations

**BERA:** British Educational Research Association

**BTEC:** Business and Technology Education Council

**DfE:** Department for Education

**ELT:** Experiential Learning Theory

**EPA:** End Point Assessment

**EPAO:** End Point Assessment Organisation

**ESFA:** Education Skills Funding Agency

**EU:** European Union

**FE:** Further Education

**HCA:** Healthcare Assistant

**HEI:** Higher Education Institution

**IfATE:** Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education

**IPA:** Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

**KSB:** Knowledge, Skills, and Behaviours

**NVQ:** National Vocational Qualification

**OECD:** Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development

**SFA:** Skills Funding Agency

**SLT:** Situated Learning Theory

**STEM:** Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

**UCAS:** Universities and Colleges Admissions Service

## **Chapter One Introduction**

The apprenticeship provision has been through one of the most extensive reforms in the post compulsory sector. Following the apprenticeship reforms, the government made a commitment to achieve 3 million apprenticeship starts by 2020. Consequentially, in England, there has been a significant increase in adult apprentices, in 2021/22, 76.3% of apprentices were aged 19 and over, and achievement rates of apprentices were low, 57.7% in 2020/21, Gov.UK (2022a). Many of these adult apprentices were already employed and using an apprenticeship to upskill within their current occupation. Therefore, this research aims to explore the lived experiences of established staff members that become apprentices, and to discover what scaffold of support is required to provide an expansive apprenticeship programme, (Fuller and Unwin, 2003). A further aim of this study is to provide a contribution to knowledge that could advise apprenticeship policy at a national level, as well as informing employers' and training providers' approach to apprenticeship training.

The thesis is separated into chapters following a sequential structure, this is to guide the reader through the study's journey from introduction through to completion, See figure 0 for general structure of this thesis.

Chapter one details the current apprenticeship context, including a definition of apprenticeships, and the key terminology used within the context of apprenticeships. Moreover, it describes how the apprenticeship journey is constructed and links with the knowledge, skills, and behaviours of a specific occupational standard that has been designed by groups of employers that have a shared interest in a particular apprenticeship position. Sub-sections of the chapter provide further detailed information regarding the apprenticeship reforms which has significantly shaped the current context of the apprenticeship provision, and how apprenticeships are funded, both of which are of critical importance to this study.

In addition, chapter one provides the specifics relating to the research aim, objectives, and contribution to knowledge. It outlines three theoretical concepts, namely: social identity theory; situated learning; and experiential learning that are used as the overarching theoretical framework from which this study is devised from. Finally, the contribution to knowledge that this research achieves is highlighted, which is of importance to all employers that offer apprenticeships through building upon the empirical works by Fuller and Unwin (2003) and Fuller et al. (2015), which examined the experiences and perspectives of apprentices

before the apprenticeship reforms. The overall contribution to knowledge will help institutions to develop local and national policies and procedures that responds to the impact on an individual's: identity, behaviour, learning and professional influence.

Chapters two and three is a literature review and includes sources from books; journals; research papers; government policies and reports; and articles all of which are accessed from Nottingham Trent University's Library resources, and through reputable publishers, including: Sage; Wiley; UK Government; Open University Press; Routledge; Cambridge University Press; Harvard University Press; Oxford University Press; and others. The literature review focuses on works relating to the history of apprenticeships through to the present day; related apprenticeship studies; identity, and social identity theory; work-based learning theories; situated learning; and experiential learning. Following a detailed literature review, chapter three concludes with the research questions, this was to ensure that this study provides an empirical exploration that contributes new knowledge, supported by a solid literature base.

Chapter four defines the methodological approach, or in other words, the philosophical framework in which this research was conducted. Moreover, it encompasses the philosophical assumptions and underpinnings upon which this research is based and the implications of these for the methods that are used to conduct the research. The chapter describes the ethical considerations that were undertaken in line with BERA (2018) guidelines. In addition, it details the design and justification for the qualitative research materials, and a pilot study that was conducted to test the initial research materials, data collection methods, and data analytical tools. The recommendations of the pilot study further shaped the research materials, and data analytical tools, these are mapped using an adapted version of Robson's (2002) framework for research design, and then justified using literature. Moreover, the chapter concludes with the final philosophical approach which justified a purposively selected sample size of  $n=9$ , and the requirement of a qualitative longitudinal study. Finally, the data collection methods, and data analysis tools are confirmed, which included interpretative phenomenological analysis as suggested by Smith and Nizza (2021), and thematic analysis as stated by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Chapters five and six details the findings and discussions, respectively, in three phases, these phases are the key stages through the apprenticeship journey where the research materials were used with the participants to explore their

lived experiences at three points including: Apprenticeship Start (0-3 months); On-Programme (3-6 months); and Final Reflection (6-12 months). The discussion sub-sections relate to the existing body of literature, and challenges that require further attention in a subsequent phase. For phase three, this discussion reflects upon the collective phases from one to three to explore, using literature, the participants' lived experiences that withdrew from their apprenticeship programme, compared to those that remained after a twelve-month period. This chapter also includes a new taxonomy, namely, the Expansive Continuum Trigon, the model is an adaptation of Fuller and Unwin's (2003) expansive-restrictive continuum. The purpose of the Expansive Continuum Trigon is for use by employers, training providers, and apprentices to validate that an apprenticeship programme is cultivating an effective learning journey.

Chapter seven concludes the thesis by detailing the contributions to knowledge and concludes with summarising the key findings, limitations, recommendations, and the researcher's reflection.

## 1.1 What are Apprenticeships?

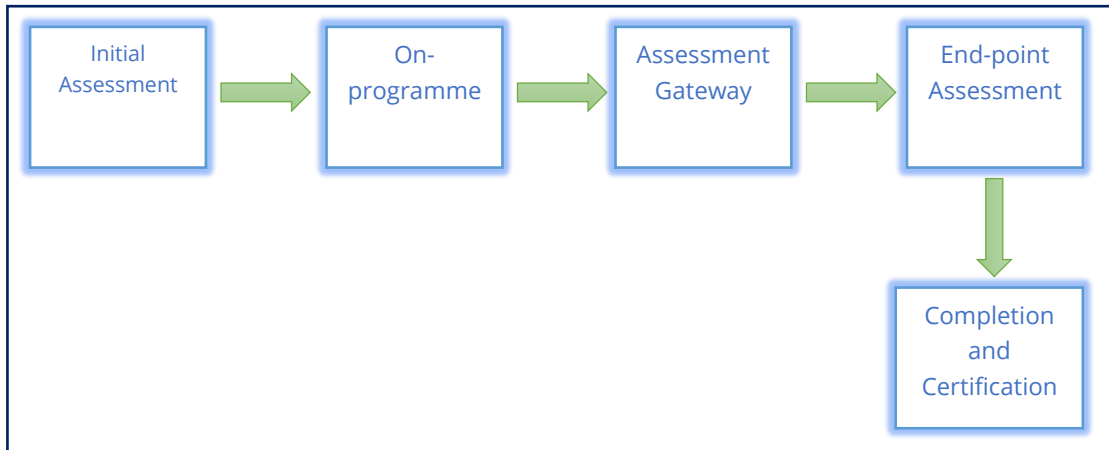
Before embarking on this research, it is prudent to define what is meant by the term apprenticeship? An apprenticeship is defined by HM Government: Apprenticeships (2022a) as a 'real job', as opposed to unpaid work-experience, apprentices can therefore expect to receive a contract of employment, where they will learn, gain experience, and get paid, Wolf (2011). Individuals that enrol on an apprenticeship, are commonly known as an 'apprentice.' An apprentice can be a person who is starting out in their career, it can also be someone who may want to change careers, or an existing staff member using an apprenticeship to upskill in their current job, (Power, 2019). Apprenticeships cannot be solely used for academic curiosity, the requirement of an apprenticeship is that must provide 'new skills', which is aligned to the knowledge, skills, and behaviours (**KSBs**) of a specific occupational standard, (Powell, 2019). Moreover, apprentices are required to be aged 16 and over and may already hold a variety of qualifications at a level higher than their apprenticeship programme. The respective apprenticeship role and responsibilities within their occupation should allow them to achieve the KSBs as their chosen apprenticeship programme requires, (Hupkau, 2015). Apprenticeships are funded from contributions made by the government and employers. An apprenticeship can take up to six years to complete, depending on the level and apprenticeship programme. Apprenticeships are offered from level 2 through to master's degrees (table 1).

**TABLE 1:** APPRENTICESHIP LEVELS (HM GOVERNMENT: APPRENTICESHIPS, 2022A)

	<b>Level</b>	<b>Equivalent education level</b>
Intermediate	2	GCSE
Advanced	3	A level
Higher	4,5,6 and 7	Foundation degree and above
Degree	6 and 7	Bachelor's or master's degree

An apprenticeship programme is sector focussed and is aligned to an occupational standard. An occupational standard provides a description of a specific occupation's KSBs which are required for an individual to be competent in a particular occupation's duties. Occupational standards are developed by sector focussed groups of employers with oversight from the Institute for

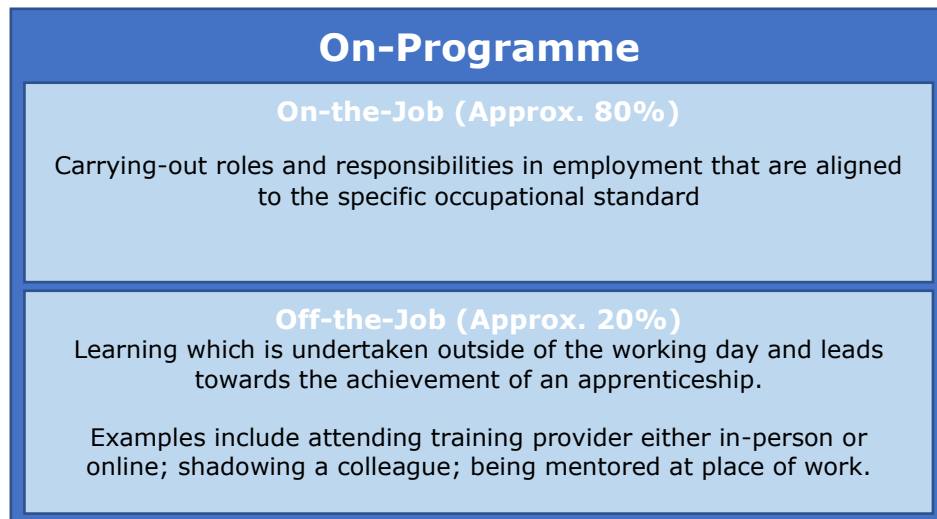
Apprenticeships and Technical Education (**IfATE**). An apprenticeship journey includes an initial assessment; on-programme study; assessment gateway; end point assessment; completion and certification (Figure 1).



**FIGURE 1: APPRENTICESHIP JOURNEY (HM GOVERNMENT: APPRENTICESHIPS, 2022A)**

An initial assessment is required to be conducted by the training provider that will be delivering the off-the-job training. The assessment is to identify whether the individual and the programme are eligible for funding; the individual's suitability for a particular apprenticeship programme; identification and recognition of any prior learning and experience aligned to the KSBs of the occupational standard; English and maths levels (Skills Funding Agency: Main Providers, 2022). The results from the initial assessment are used to make a judgement whether the individual is a suitable match for the level of study and occupational competence. In addition, the initial assessment is used to identify any learning difficulties or disabilities, and to start to formulate an individualised training plan, which includes English and maths (where applicable), and the KSBs of the relevant occupational standard that will need to be developed, and therefore eligible for funding.

On-programme is the core element (figure 1.1) where the apprentices are required to learn on and off-the-job. On-the-job occurs within their place of work, which involves duties which are aligned to the specific occupational standard. It is a statutory requirement for apprenticeships in England that apprentices are to be paid and given at least 20% off-the-job time (for a 30-hour week) for study through a training provider, activities such as shadowing and mentoring during the week can also be included as off-the-job training, where this activity has been agreed and documented as part of the agreed training plan (Skills Funding Agency: Main Providers, 2022).



**FIGURE 1.1: APPRENTICESHIPS ON-PROGRAMME**

The gateway is a process of review that is undertaken by the apprentice’s employer and training provider. This review determines whether the apprentice’s knowledge, skills and behaviours have met the minimum expectation of the occupational standard, if so, the apprentice can pass through the gateway to the end-point assessment (Gov.UK, 2022b). The end-point assessment (EPA) is conducted by an independent end-point assessment organisation (EPAO). This is the final assessment to determine whether the individual can demonstrate that they have fulfilled the KSBs, and therefore are occupationally competent. If the apprentice passes the end-point assessment they will have completed and achieved the apprenticeship (HM Government: Apprenticeships, 2022b). The apprenticeship definition and journey documented has been established as the result of the apprenticeship reforms, which are discussed in section 2.2.

### **1.2 Context: Apprenticeship Reforms**

The apprenticeship provision has been through one of the most extensive reforms in the post compulsory sector, (Powell, 2019). The report into vocational qualifications, namely, '*Review of Vocational Education: The Wolf Report*,' was the starting point of the radical reforms that subsequently took place. This report was commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) and conducted by Professor Alison Wolf (2011). Wolf (2011) states that the English labour market offers remarkably high returns for individuals that have a degree, which is in direct contrast to the those who have obtained a vocational qualification through an apprenticeship. Moreover, Wolf (2011) states that many vocational qualifications are not valued by employers or the labour market. Wolf’s (2011) statement regarding the lack of currency of vocational qualifications with employers became

forefront of the then Conservatives and Liberal Democrats coalition government's skills agenda in 2012 to increase the quality of the apprenticeship provision. The apprenticeship reforms were first established within the Richard Review (2012). Richard (2012) suggested making apprenticeships more appealing to employers by placing the employers firmly in the driving seat when it comes to the design and delivery of the newly introduced apprenticeship standards, now known as Occupational Standards (IfATE: Occupational Standards, 2022). This was further established with the introduction of the DfE's Post-16 skills plan (2016) where one of the fundamental principles of technical education is that employers, supported by education experts, will set the standards required in technical education. Consequentially, as part of the apprenticeship reforms, occupational standards fully replaced legacy apprenticeship frameworks in 2020.

The apprenticeship frameworks were primarily qualification-focused, with the main aim being for the apprentice to achieve a competency-based qualification e.g., NVQ or BTEC, by completion. Apprenticeship frameworks were developed by awarding organisations, usually in consultation with employers, unlike the apprenticeship process in 2022, there was no overall end assessment to check whether an apprentice has the right skills to be occupationally competent in employment (Gov.UK, 2017, Powell, 2019). In addition, government reviews into vocational education (Wolf, 2011; Richards, 2012) evidenced apprenticeship frameworks were not held in high regard by employers, thus suggesting a lack of employer involvement in the qualifications that were being developed within an apprenticeship framework. Thus, the need to have employers in the driving seat for the design and creation of occupational standards (Richards, 2012) based on their labour market requirements.

To support funding of the apprenticeships because of the reforms, the Conservative government introduced the apprenticeship levy in 2017 to incentivise employers to recruit more apprentices. According to HM Revenue and Customs (2016) to achieve the target of an additional 3 million apprenticeship starts in England by 2020, they have placed employers at the centre of the system through the introduction of the apprenticeship levy. The levy affects employers in all sectors, 0.5% of an annual pay budget of more than £3 million is taxed from employers, which can only be used by businesses to fund apprenticeship starts. For businesses that do not have a pay bill more than £3 million, the employer will be required to pay 5% of the apprenticeship costs, meaning the UK Government will pay the remaining 95% of the apprenticeship funding.



As a result of the apprenticeship levy, employers have been incentivised to use the apprenticeship to upskill their existing staff. Research from a UK leading business and financial adviser Grant Thornton UK LLP in 2022 titled, "*Mid-market use of apprenticeships increases*" shows that 600 from 601 mid-market employers that responded to the study confirmed that they use apprenticeships to upskill their existing staff. Moreover, the Government's Skills for Jobs (2021), applauds the success of the apprenticeship reforms and states that it has transformed apprenticeships from a second-rate option to a prestigious choice with excellent outcomes. As outlined in the same white paper, the Government have started to use the national system of employer-led occupational standards that have been created for apprenticeships as a model for technical-based qualifications, such as T-Levels and Higher Technical Qualifications to ensure employers have a vital role in designing and developing qualifications and training.

### **1.3 Context: Apprenticeship Funding Rules**

In response to the Richard (2012) review and subsequently the Enterprise Act (2016), the Institute for Apprenticeships was formed. It is now known as the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education. This public body was established to regulate occupational standards, to ensure that they are of high-quality, and employer focused. Once an occupational standard is approved by the IfATE, it then becomes eligible for funding as an apprenticeship. The Education and Skills Funding Agency (**ESFA**) have responsibility for overseeing the apprenticeship funding rules to ensure that apprenticeship funding is only being allocated for apprenticeships standards that have been approved. These rules are updated on an annual basis and detail the conditions that employers, and training providers must fulfil to be eligible to recruit and receive apprenticeship funding. Below provides extracts from the Education Skills Funding Agency: Employers (2022) apprenticeship funding rules that are prudent to highlight in the context of this study.

For employers:

- *"The apprentice must have a job role with you that provides the opportunity for them to gain the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed to achieve their apprenticeship."*
- *"The apprentice must have appropriate support and supervision on the job, by you, to carry out their job role"*
- *"Any relevant prior learning that your apprentice has and reduce the content, duration, and price of the programme accordingly. Funds must not be used to pay for skills already attained by the apprentice"*

- *"An apprenticeship agreement must be signed at the start of the apprenticeship. It is used to confirm individual employment arrangements between the apprentice and yourself and is a legal requirement"*
- *"There must be a training plan, signed by you, the apprentice, and the main provider. This sets out the plan for the agreed training"*
- *"You must make sure the apprentice is taking part in active learning throughout the apprenticeship and has regular progress reviews at least every 12 weeks that involve you and the provider."*
- *"You will provide the apprentice with the opportunity to embed and consolidate the knowledge, skills and behaviours gained through off-the-job training into the workplace."*
- *"The new minimum off-the-job training requirement for a full-time apprentice is 20% of a 30-hour week (even where the apprentice works more than 30 hours per week for an employer); this equates to an average of 6 hours of off-the-job training per week".*

The apprenticeship funding rules above also are documented within the conditions for training providers (main providers). These extracts were referenced from the Education Skills Funding Agency: Main Providers (2022) funding rules, and further highlight contextual details relevant to this study:

- *"We have changed the name of the commitment statement to training plan throughout this section"*
- *"The training plan must be agreed before any training is delivered"*
- *"Written confirmation from the employer that the apprentice will be allowed to undertake off-the-job training within their normal working hours, in addition to English and maths training if required."*
- *"Provide for an opportunity to update the training plan (e.g., where it is necessary to replan any off-the-job training that was missed or not delivered)"*

Following the information above, table 2 provides a concise view of the elements of the funding rules that are critical within the examination of this study. The purpose of which is to provide the wider policy context as it currently stands, which have implications on the apprentices' lived experience.

**Table 2:** Apprenticeship Funding Rules 2022/23, Education Skills Funding Agency (2022)

<b>Funding Rules 2022/23</b>
1. The apprentice must be able to achieve the knowledge, skills, and behaviours from a specific occupational standard within their job role
2. The apprenticeship should only address new knowledge, skills, and behaviours.
3. Employer needs to provide support and supervision on-the-job
4. Apprenticeship Agreement must be agreed between the apprentice and the employer; this is a legal requirement
5. A fulltime apprentice must receive a minimum of 6 hours per week off-the-job paid for by the employer
6. A training plan is agreed by the apprentice, employer, and training provider, and should be updated where necessary
7. The apprentice should be taking part in active learning and is provided with opportunities to embed and consolidate the knowledge, skills, and behaviours gained through off-the-job training into the workplace
8. The apprentice has regular progress reviews at least every 12 weeks that involve the employer and the training provider

The key documents referenced within the funding rules (see Education Skills Funding Agency: Main Providers (2019)) include the: apprenticeship agreement; commitment statement; and training plan.

According to UCAS (2022), the apprenticeship agreement is a legal requirement, and is equivalent to a contract of employment, detailing what the apprentice and employer have agreed. For existing staff that then become an apprentice, their original contract of employment will need to be updated to include the same level of detail. This detail includes the duration of employment; the training that the apprentice will receive; details of the apprenticeship programme; and working conditions. The employer is required to provide a copy of this signed agreement to the apprentice and the training provider. According to the Education Skills Funding Agency: Main Providers (2019), a commitment statement is completed before the apprenticeship agreement is signed and is a document that sets out how the apprentice, the employer, and the training provider will support the achievement of the apprenticeship. In the funding rules for 2019/20, the commitment statement was often referred to as the individual learning plan.

In addition, the ESFA decided to remove the requirement of a 'commitment statement,' and instead from August 2022 this document has been reframed and integrated as part of the training plan. Considering the rapid roll out of the reforms and the focus on meeting the needs of employers, the increase in using the apprenticeship levy to upskill staff, and now the wider implications on other forms of tertiary education, the aim of this study will explore how the reforms have impacted on established staff members that become apprentices during their contract of employment, this is further discussed in chapter one.

#### **1.4 Research Aim**

This research focuses on established staff members that become apprentices after already being an established member of staff within a full or part-time position. Established staff members are defined as those who were already in employment before starting an apprenticeship and are using this form of training to upskill within their current occupation. There is a paucity of research that has explored the experiences of this type of apprentice to determine the impact on an individual's social identity, behaviour, learning and professional influence within the organisation that they are employed. Recognising that most apprentices in 2021/22 were (76.3%) aged 19 and over, and achievement rates of apprentices are extremely low; 57.7% in 2020/21, Gov.UK (2022a), this research aims to explore the lived experiences of established staff members that become apprentices, and to discover what scaffold of support is required to provide an expansive apprenticeship programme, (Fuller and Unwin, 2003). A further aim of this study is to provide a contribution to knowledge that could advise apprenticeship policy at a national level, as well as informing employers' and training providers' approach to apprenticeship training.

#### **1.5 Research Objective Statements**

Through extensive reading (Fuller and Unwin, 2003, Fuller et al., 2015, Fuller and Unwin, 2017, Brockmann et al. 2021, Böhn and Deutscher, 2022, etc.), the researcher has identified the following theoretical concepts which inform and offer explanations and academic insights to the experience, social context and learning within apprenticeships, these include:

- social identity theory;
- situated learning;
- experiential learning.

These concepts have provided the overarching theoretical framework for this thesis which are used to frame the research enquiry to achieve the following objective statements:

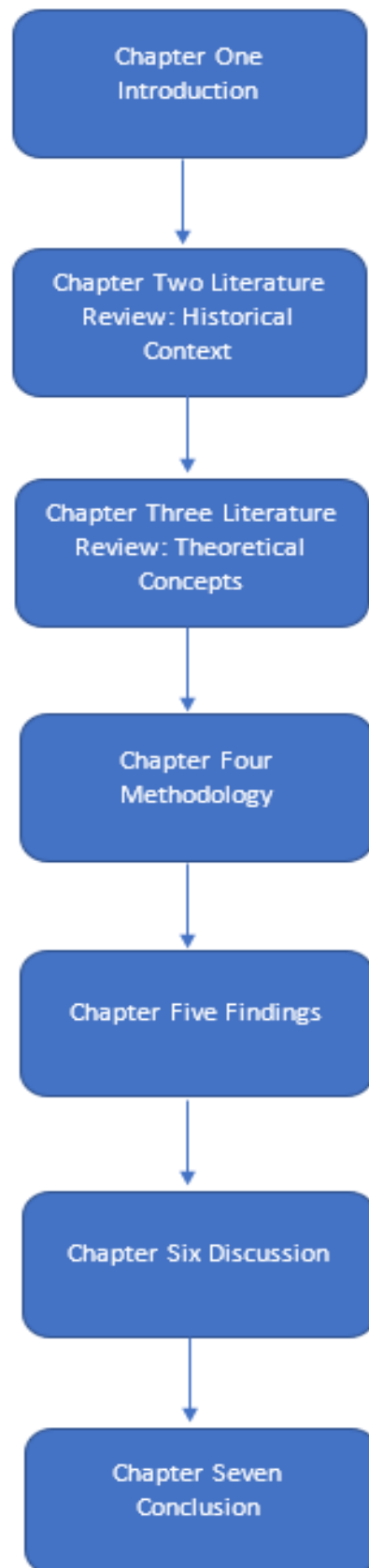
1. Using literature and related studies, examine how existing knowledge supports the research enquiry, and the opportunities to provide new knowledge.
2. From reviewing the current literature, identify research questions that provide a contribution to knowledge.
3. Using a methodological approach, conduct research over a minimum of 12-months to explore the lived experiences of a purposive sample of participants.
4. Conduct a qualitative longitudinal study with several participants who have enrolled to an apprenticeship programme who previously were employed into a non-apprenticeship position, with particular focus on how the participants' preconception of apprenticeships and their lived experience as an apprentice impact on their: behaviour; social identity; communities of practice; and organisational standing e.g., how an individual views their position within employment.
5. Develop a theoretical model that supports apprentices, employers, and training providers to improve the apprenticeship journey.

This inquiry provides a contribution to knowledge, the detail of which will be derived from the research questions from completion of the literature review (see chapter 3.5). At this stage, a general overview of the contribution to knowledge is identified.

### **1.6 Contribution to Knowledge Overview**

This research is of importance to all employers that offer apprenticeships; those working in an apprenticeship training provider; IfATE and the DfE. Building upon the empirical work by Fuller et al. (2015) which examined the experiences and perspectives of apprentices before the apprenticeship reforms, the findings of this study focus on a broader range of adults (aged 18+), within the post-era of the apprenticeship reforms. This contribution to knowledge will help institutions to develop local and national policies and procedures that responds to the impact on an individual's: identity, behaviour, learning and professional influence, because of becoming an apprentice as an existing employee.

To further support legibility figure 1.2 shows an overview of the thesis structure.



**FIGURE 1.2: STRUCTURE OF THESIS**

## Chapter Two Literature Review: Historical Context

The review of literature is a critical evaluation, analysis, and synthesis of existing knowledge relevant to a research problem (Hart, 2005). Saunders and Rojon (2011) outlines the following that should be addressed through completion of an effective literature review: using the most relevant research on the topic the researcher should: evaluate published research, critique with authority and objectivity, identify 'key players' in the field, contextualise and justify the research, identify key theory and concepts.

Following Saunders and Rojons' (2011) holistic process, this research begins with outlining the apprenticeship historical and policy context, followed by identifying the gaps in existing knowledge to develop upon, and link to key theoretical concepts to ensure that this research contributes to new knowledge.

### 2.1 Historical Context

According to several sources (Fuller, 2016; Burke, 2016; Mirza-Davies, 2015; Ainley and Rainbird, 2014; Lane, 1996) a form of apprenticeship existed as far back to at least the medieval era, where apprentices were bound to the indentures of their 'master' for usually a seven-year term (Aldrich, 2005). By the 14<sup>th</sup> century apprenticeships were thriving, one of the first forms of legislation that set out conditions of training was cited in the Elizabethan Statute of Artificers in 1563. Before the introduction of this legislation, apprenticeships were regulated by the Guilds of Trades and Craftsmen (Business, Information and Skills Committee, 2012). After peaking in the 1960s apprenticeships started to decline, with half as many apprentices in employment in 1995 as there were in 1979 (Mirza-Davies, 2015). In response, the modern apprenticeship programme was launched in 1994 by the new Labour Government, which the then Government regarded as a success.

According to Mirza-Davies (2015, pg. 6),

*"225,000 young people had started a Modern Apprenticeship in England and Wales, by September 1998. Most apprenticeship starts were in business administration, engineering manufacturing and retailing. Early recruitment to Modern Apprenticeships was mainly of men, because of the sectors included in the pilots, but by 1998 around half those undertaking Modern Apprenticeships were women. Most employers of apprentices were small firms and very few firms employed more than five apprentices. Modern Apprenticeships were hailed as a success by both apprentices and employers"*

Modern apprenticeships were aimed at those aged 18 to 19 years old, in 2004 the government made changes to the modern apprenticeships by removing the upper age limit to enable those aged over 25 years old to become an apprentice.

In 2004 the Leitch review of skills was commissioned by the Labour government; this review was tasked with addressing the UK's long-term skills needs. The review was completed in 2006, and outlined a vision for the UK, which was to become a world leader in skills by 2020.

The Leitch (2006. pg. 21) stated that

*"The Review recommends that, as with vocational qualifications, employers should drive the content of Apprenticeships through their SSC [Sector Skills Council]"*

*"Employers were reluctant to contribute towards the training costs because they did not have confidence in the quality of training on offer and felt frustrated by the lack of influence over qualifications"*

Partly in response to the Leitch review, in 2006 higher apprenticeships were introduced, thus forging the way for several different higher apprenticeship (level 4 and 5) pathways across various sectors. From 2006 individuals starting an apprenticeship rapidly increased, reaching over 450,000 in 2010/11, the government (Gov.UK, 2010) attributed this to their Train to Gain initiative which provided £180 million to offer an additional 50,000 apprenticeship places across numerous sectors. However, even with the introduction of modern apprenticeships and a significant amount of government investment to improve the quality of programmes, apprenticeship outcomes remained low, overall success rates in 2010/11 were 76.4%, then continued to fall, in 2011/12 and 2012/13 the overall success rates were 73.8% and 72.3%, respectively (Gov.UK, 2022a).

In 2010, the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats coalition government replaced the targets that were born out of the Leitch review, however it continued with the ambition of the UK being the leader of world class skills (Department for Business, Innovation, and Skills, 2010) through introducing a new skills strategy in 2010, 'Skills for Sustainable Growth'. A key priority of this strategy was the expansion and improvement of apprenticeships:

*"Apprenticeships are at the heart of the system that we will build. They bring together individuals, motivated and working hard to develop themselves; employers, investing in their own success but supporting a programme with wider social, environmental, and economic value; and Government, providing public funding and building the prestige and reputation of the programme."*

Department for Business, Innovation, and Skills (2010, pg.7)



Because of the Skills for Sustainable Growth strategy, apprenticeships for individuals aged 16-18 were fully funded by the government to enrol to an apprenticeship programme. However, for those aged 19 and over, they had to fund 50% of their apprenticeship programme, often this was either funded by a respective employer or by the individual through a loan. This led to an 88% fall in apprenticeship starts of those who were aged 25 and over. In 2014, the Skills Funding Agency, now known as the ESFA changed the apprenticeship funding rules so that all apprentices regardless of age will no longer be required to pay a contribution. In 2015, the Conservative government set out to reform apprenticeships, which as discussed in the context section of this thesis, brought in a large-scale reform of apprenticeships, including the occupational standards, apprenticeship levy, degree apprenticeships (level 6 and 7), and the establishment of the Institute for Apprenticeships, now known as the IfATE. Following the apprenticeship reforms, the government made a commitment to achieve 3 million apprenticeship starts by 2020, however according to the Gov.UK (2021) progress report on the apprenticeship reforms 2021:

*"Since the apprenticeship reforms began in May 2015, by January 2021 there have been 2,373,100 apprenticeship starts, representing 79.10% of target. Whilst the 3m target was not met, over the same period apprenticeships have become of longer duration and are now co-designed with employers. Our transformational reforms mean that the starts now made on the Apprenticeship Programme are into higher-quality training."*

According to Power (2019) the fall in starts is associated to the complexity of the apprenticeship levy and the 20% requirement for off-the-job training. Since the reforms have been in place, due to the number of apprentices that 'drop-out' from their apprenticeship programme, the achievement rate has significantly decreased to 46.9% in 2018/19, and 58.7% in 2019/20 (Gov.UK, 2022a). The government's skills strategies since 2003 have all consistently raised concerns regarding the quality of apprenticeship programmes and outcomes. There have been various attempts to improve this through reforming the regulatory bodies (e.g., Skills Funding Agency, Ofsted, IfATE), including the introduction of the failed 14-19 vocational diplomas (Education and Skills Committee, 2007), which attempted to put technical education in parity of esteem with a traditional academic route in Secondary Education.

Immediately after the full rollout of the apprenticeship reforms in 2020, whilst acknowledging the Covid-19 pandemic would have undoubtedly impacted on the apprenticeship figures, according to the Gov.UK (2022c) Apprenticeship headline figures, apprenticeship starts significantly increased (43%) during August 2021 – October 2022, compared to the same period in 2020/21. Under 19

apprenticeship starts represents the smallest amount with just over 30%, the highest proportion of apprentices are aged 19 and over, with apprentices aged 25 and over making up the majority (38%) of new apprenticeships starts during this period. The increase in Higher Apprenticeships continues to grow, within the same dataset, it shows that they now make up almost 30% of all apprenticeship starts. Despite the recovery of apprenticeship starts, these datasets also highlight that achievement rates decreased by approximately 13%.

Hupkau (2015) analysis of the past and future growth of apprenticeships provides some valuable insights. Her analysis of the apprenticeship landscape in England, demonstrates that since the introduction of the apprenticeship reforms, there has been a significant increase of individuals aged 25 and over, and provides evidence that at least within Retail, Health, and Business, the individuals were recruited from existing employees rather than new entrants to firms. Supporting the analysis completed by Hupkau (2015), the DfE's Employer Skills Survey (2019) which received 16,070 respondents across England, Northern Ireland, and Wales, reported data shows that just over half (52%) offer apprenticeships to existing employees; one in ten (10%) offer them only to this group. Within the same survey, it shows that employers who confirmed that they only offer apprenticeships to existing employees increased from 2016 levels (6%). When one considers the increase rate of adult learners, decrease in achievement rates, combined with the growth in higher apprenticeships, especially with those who were already employed, it does start to suggest that existing employees that start an apprenticeship are encountering some barriers that are preventing them to achieve. Fuller and Unwin (2017) poses two problems related to the increase in existing employees becoming apprentices as a method to upskill. Firstly, they state that there is a danger that these apprentices are being accredited for their existing skills without spending sufficient time training to update their skills or retrain in a new occupational field. Secondly, that this practice of using an apprenticeship to upskill existing staff does not generate new employment opportunities for young people.

From reviewing the historical context of apprenticeships, successive governments have consistently agreed that employers should be in the driving seat; and the quality of apprenticeship programmes need to improve, and there is unmistakable evidence that supports this. Interestingly, whilst much of the focus is on the employer needs, there is a scarcity of detail in government policy that considers previous empirical apprenticeship studies that focused on the pedagogical and professional identity impact on apprentices, this is particularly

prudent considering the increase in apprenticeships of individuals already employed.

## **2.2 Synopsis of Related Studies**

This synopsis of related studies is providing an overview of all related studies in the first instance, from which each theoretical concept and findings are further explored and defined as part of the literature review. There are several published studies which follow an interpretivist paradigm, interpretivism is developed through critique of positivism with a subjective perspective (Weaver and Olson, 2006). Interpretivism is concerned with 'depth' of understanding, including those related to the context in which the research is being conducted. It views humans as different from other phenomena, this is because humans require an exploration that examines the 'meanings' more in depth, and considers the wider context within a human life, for example, culture, social realities, and individual lived experiences (Welford et al., 2011). Interpretivism moves away from generalisation of an individual, instead it requires a richness in the insights gathered (Myers, 2008; Bhattacharjee, 2012; Saunders et al., 2012). Associated to interpretivism is social constructivism which originates in sociology (Andrews, 2012).

A constructivist paradigm states that knowledge is constructed by an individual, moving away from the notion of didactical learning, where individuals are required to passively acquire knowledge, (McCray, 2007). Moreover, constructivism suggests that a person builds their own representation of what they are learning, which is then integrated into their pre-existing knowledge, more academically known as a schema (Piaget, 1932; McCray, 2007). Examples of this, was the constructivist apprenticeship research completed by Collins, Brown, and Newman (1987); and Derry and Lesgold (1996). These studies demonstrated how people learn from one another, through observation, imitation, and modelling (Collins, Brown, and Newman, 1987). A fundamental element of a constructivist apprenticeship is the notion by which knowledge is openly shared (Derry and Lesgold, 1996). Moreover, that employers need to enculturate learning in the form of a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1999) to enable effective 'on-the-job' training.

The DfE's (2019) apprenticeship off-the-job training policy allows for training to be entirely delivered in the workplace; therefore, an employer and training provider can decide how the off-the-job training is delivered. There is the potential that some employers will not enculturate a constructivist approach to

learning, which could result in apprentices finding it difficult to make progress on apprenticeships that do not share themes with a dual system of vocational educational training (Heikkinen and Lassmigg, 2015) that incorporates a day/block release model. Richmond (2017) states that a day or block release is required as any respectable apprenticeship will require hundreds of hours of training away from the workplace, because it is related to a skilled occupation requiring substantial training. Other related studies appear to focus on three key theoretical underpinnings, namely: social identity theory, situated learning and experiential learning, these are further discussed later within this literature review. With regards to social identity theory, Tajfel and Turner (1979) proposed groups (e.g., in the context of employment) in which people belong to are an important source of pride and self-esteem. Moreover, that groups give us a sense of belonging to the social world. The social world in the context of employment also is a determining factor of organisational behaviour (Haslam, 2004). As a result of the growth in the use of apprenticeships to upskill existing staff, more existing staff members are becoming apprentices. This could change the context for an employee from which they are accustomed to and therefore may affect their behaviour within the organisation that they are employed.

Haslam (2004) defines an organisation (e.g., employed setting) as a social structure, moreover he states that they are not merely 'stimulus settings' that constrain or facilitate behaviour but instead they change our feelings, goals, values, motives, attitudes, and beliefs. Therefore, when existing staff become apprentices, it could have a psychological impact because of their own perception of apprenticeships and those held by the organisation they work for. More recently, Brockmann and Laurie (2016) conducted a study over twelve months, with groups of Motor Vehicle and Construction apprentices, which explored the role of the academic-vocational divide in learner identity to challenge the assumptions made about apprentices e.g., that apprenticeships are for the low-skilled. Their conclusions were like Willis (1977) and Archer and Yamashita (2003), and produced a mixture of results, one dataset provided an example of how some apprentices identify, e.g., construction apprentices insisted that academic work was 'not for them' and identified themselves as practical learners and non-academic.

Brockmann and Laurie (2016) believe that these apprentices identify this way due to their socio-economic backgrounds, experiences of learning, the content and structure of the apprenticeship programme and through the assumptions made by policy makers and educators of their 'academic' ability. This study did

not link directly to social identity theory e.g., the impact on an individual's social standing, but there are compelling links that could have been made, such as Korte's (2007) research on how the apprentices' social identity has implications for learning within their organisation, for example the apprentices' attitude towards learning as part of their job role. Moreover, further links including the apprenticeship reforms and situated learning theory would have provided a deeper insight into the findings. There have been many studies that have focused on Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory in relation to apprenticeships, for example, Fuller and Unwin (2003).

Fuller and Unwin (2003) explored how situated learning theory could be implemented within an institutional context (e.g., employed setting), this could have linked with Tajfel and Turner's (1979) research, to further explore how the apprentices' established groups within an institutional context impacted on their behaviour and social identity. Parker (2006) framed an apprenticeship as a holistic 'learning' experience to establish how apprentices' participation in an established community of practice facilitated their adaptation to and assimilation of various skills, procedures, and institutional norms. A further exploration of how established communities of practice are impacted when an existing member of staff becomes an apprentice would have provided a more philosophical understanding into the research findings, especially considering Haslam's (2006) social identity study on how an organisation impacts on employees' social identity and organisational standing. Mills (2011) published research which used the situated learning conceptual framework as a model of learning in a community of practice, like with Collins, Brown, and Newman (1987) constructivist apprenticeship study, people or 'newcomers' in this context assimilate norms, behaviour, values, relationships, and beliefs. This study provided some valuable insights, such as that apprentices could make better connections to the course content because of being part of a community of practice.

However, it did not consider how apprentices benefit from experiential learning, Kolb (1984), or how the principles of experiential learning could be applied in conjunction with situated learning e.g., the four-stage cycle of learning and apprentices' learning styles. Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory has provided a scaffold to several research studies that are linked to work-based learning, in the researcher's opinion the most relevant being Ritchie (2011) due to the links made to the apprenticeship provision. Ritchie (2011) researched into the relevance of experiential learning to apprentices in the commercial and

industrial market. Ritchie (2011) found that experiential learning was a cost-effective extension of in-house apprenticeship development programmes with apprentices demonstrating an increase in motivation, improvement in self-awareness and personal responsibility. This study could have also considered how the apprentices' experiential learning interlinked with situated learning and social identity theory, debatably, this would have identified long-term benefits to the apprentices and to the organisation. According to Fuller et al. (2015), theirs was the first detailed empirical study that examined the experiences and perspectives of apprentices aged 25 and over, and that of their respective employer. The research methods were mixed using quantitative and qualitative approaches to capture the 'lived reality' of adult apprenticeships in England. The study explored the motivation, experience, and the perceptions of the participants from within this age group. The other elements of this research were focused primarily on the perspective of the employer. The overall outcome of the project was to identify recommendations for policy and practice. Fuller et al. (2015) showed results which demonstrated that the desire for adults to participate in an apprenticeship was mixed. This was attributed to the association of the apprenticeship being for school leavers or young people. The study touched upon professional identity, referring to this as a dual identity as workers and learners (Heikkinen and Lassmigg, 2015); clearly some participants were uncomfortable with this notion, since the conclusions suggested some unease from the participants of being employees deemed as 'apprentices' (pg. 46). The positivity regarding apprenticeships were in the main from those who were employed as managers who saw this as an opportunity to upskill using an apprenticeship.

Fuller et al. (2015) study presents some alignment to the research objectives of this thesis. There is some recognition of existing employees that become apprentices, but the focus was on a definition of adult referring to people aged 25 or over. The Government's definition for the purpose of funding, defines an adult apprentice as a person who starts the programme aged 19 and over. This study was before the introduction of the apprenticeship levy in 2017 employers were not trying to supplement the upskilling of existing staff through this additional tax on their bottom-line. Since 2015, the apprenticeship provision has seen an increase in existing employees who have started an apprenticeship, this remains a gap within the current literature review, as does whether the increase in apprenticeship provision, especially at the higher levels has changed the perception of those that have enrolled to one. Leonard et al. (2017) conducted a further study which draws upon Fuller et al. (2015), both of which highlight the

steady increase in adults participating in apprenticeships. This study attempts to develop understanding of the ways in which employment, training and older age are acknowledged, experienced, performed and managed in organisations. Using qualitative research conducted in England with older apprentices, the study explored how older apprentices found the experience and management of training 'out of step.' Similar to Fuller et al. (2015, pg. 1671), this study highlights that:

*"Most Western contexts, the consolidation of 'older' and 'apprentice' presents a challenge to normative understandings of the 'right age' to undertake vocational training."*

The paper concludes that if adult training schemes are to succeed, some fundamental changes may need to be made to understandings of age and ageing within contemporary workplaces. In addition, whilst there is an acknowledgement of the fact that vocational training in older age has a considerable way to go before society accepted *as it as 'normal' in employment* (pg. 1684), the notion of 'ageing is on the decline' is starting to counter the perception of being too old to become an apprentice. Similarly, as with Fuller et al. (2015) this study took place before the apprenticeship levy was in force, and whilst some highly valuable findings will certainly support this thesis, especially those relating to the context of age and the perception that this has on professional identity, it does not deal with the status of being an apprentice in the broader sense within an individual's lived context, nor with the impact on an individual's communities of practice on and off the apprenticeship programme.

Further examples of studies explored apprenticeships, but more in terms of apprenticeship policy and quality, examples include Fuller (2016), Gambin and Hogarth (2016), Böhn and Deutscher (2022), and Cedefop (2020). Fuller (2016) was a policy focused paper to highlight the tension of quality versus quantity in the apprenticeship provision in England, especially considering the government's policy reforms to increase the apprenticeship numbers. This insightful paper suggests that while some apprenticeship provision is effective in meeting the needs of the apprentices and their respective employer, there is a disparity of the level of quality apprenticeship programmes across England that do not distinguish how an apprenticeship should be designed, developed, and supported, and recognised as a model of learning for occupational expertise.

Distinguishing the rise in existing staff members becoming an apprentice as a dual system of vocational educational training (Heikkinen and Lassmigg, 2015), Fuller (2016) identifies some extremely prominent issues regarding the

expansion of apprenticeships. As a result of the apprenticeship levy the increase in apprenticeship providers and employers wanting to use this levy to upskill their respective staff is likely to have amplified the concerns raised about quality compared to Fuller (2016) study. Moreover, this thesis will draw on the findings presented in this paper not just in terms of quality, but also with respect to the importance of recognising that an apprenticeship is a model of learning that requires investment from both the employee, and the employer. Gambin and Hogarth (2016) journal article explored factors related to apprenticeship completion in England. This study was focused on level 2 and level 3 apprenticeships and discovers several factors that have an impact on the likelihood of achievement and completion, including: gender, unemployment rates, demographics, aspects of the apprenticeship programme (Brockmann and Laurie, 2016). Within this study, the conclusions stress the importance of addressing the issue of non-completion for many reasons, especially the disadvantages individuals may suffer in the labour market due to non-completion.

Böhn and Deutscher (2022) included this study within their own analysis of a central cross-study and cross-sector findings within the context of non-completion of an apprenticeship programme. Böhn and Deutscher (2022) systematically reviewed and meta-synthesized 70 similar studies. Their results found the top eight reasons for non-completion were: a low training wage; not being trained in the apprentice's career choice; an apprentice's low educational level; inferior performance level within training; learning disability; increasing age; migration background; and the training occupation. There were several recommendations, the one that was defined as most important, was to encourage researchers and policymakers to extend future research to examine activity factors as reasons for dropout, both at the workplace and in vocational schools (pg. 12).

Cedefop (2020) study explored the rise in adult apprenticeships and revealed that the existing research was scarce and fragmented. Using a conceptual and theoretical point of view, Cedefop (2020) examined existing studies from European Union (EU) countries, including four non-EU countries, in terms of what is in place to support adult apprenticeships. Cedefop (2020) followed two main research questions: are there two diverse types of apprenticeship, one for young people and one for adults, the other questions focused on access to apprenticeships for adults. The results of this study did produce some intriguing conclusions, including the need for a differentiated apprenticeship policy, and



training approach that considers the diverse range of adult characteristics (e.g., prior work experience, more mature, more motivated) that often differ to younger apprentices (Fuller et al., 2015; Fuller, 2016; Heikkinen and Lassmigg, 2015). Fletcher (2022) conducted research that focussed on apprenticeships in England, with a focus on participants that were solicitor apprentices. The study examined the formation of the apprentices' professional identity, this was after the solicitors regulatory authority reformed the solicitor occupational standard. This standard provides individuals with the opportunity to train and become qualified as a lawyer. Fletcher (2022) explored the inter-dependent relationship between the employer and apprentice to establish how apprentices make sense of their experience whilst interacting within a community of practice.

When describing how the solicitor apprenticeship standard is being delivered in the workplace, Fletcher (2022) states that apprentices:

*"Are exposed to authentic workplace activities and deal with clients. The work-based activities are shared with the apprentice who will be able to ask questions and contribute to the activities under the guidance of an experienced practitioner. This form of learning is reflected in the work of Lave and Wenger (1991)"* (pg. 14)

As with most studies relating to apprenticeships, a community of practice was a key concept as well as 'situated learning' that Fletcher (2022) used as his literature evidence base to draw upon throughout the findings. Similarly, Fletcher (2022) discusses the notion of apprentices 'constructing' knowledge which resonates with Mills (2011) published research which focussed on situated learning, also with Collins, Brown, and Newman (1987) constructivist apprenticeship study, where people or 'newcomers' in this context assimilate norms, behaviour, values, relationships, and beliefs. Fletcher (2022) interviewed a group of 32 solicitor apprentices, this was to understand why they undertook the apprenticeship; how they are learning on and off-the-job; and how the apprentices' professional identity is formed through engagement with their mentors, workplace, and the clients that they partly represent. Fletcher (2022) findings suggest that the apprenticeship cultivates the identity of the apprentices, he attributed this to their engagement in work activities. In addition, that the apprentices' responses suggest that through being part of an active community of practice had significantly contributed to the development of their professional identity. Fletcher (2022) also indicated the importance of both on and off-the-job learning, especially the initial development of knowledge. He states that:

*"Their [apprentices] earlier experiences provided them with the foundation to construct a body of work-based knowledge which supported them in their formation as a professional practitioner. The workplace was constructing their knowledge and this form of learning was tacit."* (pg. 20)

Fletcher (2022) also adds that learners can construct their knowledge from their experiences in the workplace, and suggests that this was:

*"An active and on-going process which they were drawing upon past experiences and how they had built upon that knowledge in the present"* (pg. 21)

Fletcher (2022) concludes with suggesting that the apprenticeship model is effective for individuals that want to become solicitors, as it places the apprentice in the role of a professional practitioner, which exposes them to an authentic place of work, and practices which delivers their resilience to deal with complex ethical issues and supports form their professional identity (Katz, 2013). Fletcher (2022) findings were not based on a longitudinal study, most of the solicitor apprentices that were interviewed were at least three years through their apprenticeship programme, there was no discussion regarding the formation of their professional identity from the point of enrolment through to their third year. Moreover, the participants were predominantly 'young people' or school leavers that previously obtain three A-Levels and five GCSEs which includes English Language and Maths. Therefore, the group of participants provided a narrowed view of the apprenticeship journey that does not compare with most apprentices. For example, the participants in Fletcher's (2022) study would not feature within Böhn and Deutscher (2022) extensive study, as it is likely that as trainee solicitors, they were on a reasonable training wage, had elevated levels of attainment, and were clearly being trained in an occupation in which they wanted a career in. Furthermore, all the participants were employed directly into an apprenticeship role, so it is unclear what the impact on communities of practice and professional identity is to an existing staff member in a law firm that enrolls to a solicitor apprenticeship, and whether in this circumstance, this type of apprentice forms a dual identity (Heikkinen and Lassmigg, 2015; Fuller, 2016).

Finally, as clearly stated in Fletchers' (2022) introduction, apprentices have a statutory right to one-fifth study leave, this is the case for all apprenticeship standards, however there are varying levels of compliance with this legal requirement across all sectors (Fuller, 2016), and as one would expect, the Law sector is very compliant with this statutory duty. Brockmann et al. (2021) conducted a study that explored the variation of experiences from apprentices

across different sectors and employer organisations, unlike Fletcher's (2022) exploration, this study focused on lower-level apprenticeships. Brockmann et al. (2021) study built upon Fuller and Unwin's (2017) examination of the apprenticeship landscape. Brockmann et al. (2021) focus was the extent to which apprentices were able to access high quality on and off-the-job training. This study was conducted with five sectors, including STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) related occupations: engineering; construction; and digital, as well as non-STEM related occupations which included: retail; and social care. The apprenticeship levels that Brockmann et al. (2021) examined were at level 2 and 3. Their methodology was to first examine related policy documentation, interviews with national and sector-level bodies, followed by interviews with two employers from each sector. This culminated to twenty-one interviews with managers, trainers, supervisors, and apprentices.

The findings suggest sectors that have a historical record of offering apprenticeships, such as STEM related sectors, are providing high quality on-the-job training, and that most apprentices were new employees. Moreover, that these sectors demonstrated a good understanding of apprenticeships, therefore took a leading role in co-ordinating, delivery, and monitoring the progress of their respective apprentices. Furthermore, these sectors were ensuring that apprentices experienced the breadth of their organisation, thus, apprentices were placed across different areas within the business to encourage the crossing boundaries between distinct groups (Fuller and Unwin, 2015), and to support each apprentice in their understanding of how their position fits within the organisation.

In terms of off-the-job training, the STEM related sectors worked extensively with training providers to ensure that both on and off-the-job training are closely aligned to enable apprentices to apply knowledge and skills gained through a training provider in the workplace. Examples of this alignment included a collective approach to regular progress reviews, mentoring and shadowing apprentices, and to integrate communities of practice from within the employing organisation, as well as those established within the training provider (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Mentoring was particularly viewed as a crucial part of the apprenticeship, this was to ensure that apprentices were given the time to reflect and to offer them opportunities to explore innovative ideas that they could attempt in a complex work environment (Kolb, 2015). Within all STEM related organisations involved in this study, they expressed that the apprentices' status was regarded as learners rather than workers, this was to ensure that

learning opportunities and sharing knowledge were accessible to all their respective apprentices. In addition, all employers across these sectors agreed that their approach to cultivating a culture of learning benefits the apprentice, as well as their organisation in developing their workforce.

Conversely, in the retail and social care sectors where apprenticeships were an innovative approach to training and development, apprentices were primarily fully productive workers than learners (Brockmann et al., 2021), and in fact most apprentices were existing staff members that were required to complete further training. The off-the-job element of the apprenticeship was viewed as separate from their respective apprentices' job role, thus, employers viewed this as the responsibility of the training provider. Consequently, there was truly little interaction between the training provider and an employer, thus, there was no attempt made to cross boundaries in terms of communities of practice from within the organisation and the training provider (Wenger, 1998). The training plan was solely created by the training provider, and not in conjunction with the apprentice and the employer.

Apprentices across these sectors revealed that they often found it difficult to complete or even attend off-the-job training due to the pressures of day-to-day work. The study conducted by Brockmann et al. (2021) demonstrated the importance of an organisation's apprenticeship knowledge, in terms of what the purpose of an apprenticeship is, and the culture of learning that is required to ensure that both the apprentice and employer benefit from the training. This study also demonstrated where on and off-the-job training is co-created, and the apprenticeship is an equally shared entity, that apprentices are more likely to achieve and be trained within the workforce. This is also demonstrated through the vastly healthier outcomes evidenced in retention and achievement rates of apprentices within STEM sectors employers, compared to those in Retail and Social Care. Finally, the importance of cross boundaries between communities of practice as facilitated through systems conveners between an employer and training provider (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015) also improved the apprentices lived experience, as well as understanding their position within their respective job role.

From the synopsis, the common theoretical concepts are social identity theory, situated learning, and experiential learning, these are explored within the study to establish where they interlink.

## **Chapter Three Literature Review: Theoretical Concepts**

From reviewing the historical context of apprenticeships, this chapter examines previous studies and alignment to theoretical concepts.

### **3.1 Social Identity Theory**

From further examination of the identified concept of dual identity of apprentices (Fuller et al., 2015; Heikkinen and Lassmigg, 2015; Leonard et al., 2017) from chapter two, it encroaches on sociological and psychological theories of identity, namely: Identity Theory (Sociology), and Social Identity Theory (Psychology). Broadly, identity theory defines how a person constructs identity meaning, moreover how that meaning enacts them in social situations, responds to identity related scenarios or feedback (Stets and Serpe, 2013; Stryker and Burke, 2000). Identity theory states that a person's identity is created through internalised meanings which are attached to an individual, a role, or as a group member (Stets and Burke, 2014; Stets and Serpe, 2013). Stets (2018) suggests that a person, role, and group are the general bases of identity theory. Stets (2018) goes further by stating that group (such as a team, family, political standing) and social group (e.g., age, race, and gender) are representative of two parts of the base of identity, which can be categorised as membership. Stets (2018) argues that all basis of identity theory overlap, in particular group and social identities when an individual enacts a role, triggering corresponding responses in behaviour.

McCall and Simmons (1978) adopt a multiple self and identity perspective and use the language of identity prominence, or hierarchies of prominence to describe significant variations in an individual's identity. Like Stets (2018), McCall and Simmons (1978) recognise that identities can overlap, moreover they argue that while identities can be imposed on a person, they can also be negotiated in interactive settings (Owens, Robinson, and Smith-Lovin, 2010). Referring to the works by Fuller et al. (2015), Heikkinen and Lassmigg (2015) and Leonard et al. (2017), their respective research suggests there were societal perceptual inputs regarding the appropriate age and junior positioning of an apprentice within an organisation. These inputs could have either consciously or non-consciously imposed on their respective participants, which contributed to the notion of an apprentice having a dual identity as workers and learners (Fuller et al., 2015; Heikkinen and Lassmigg, 2015).

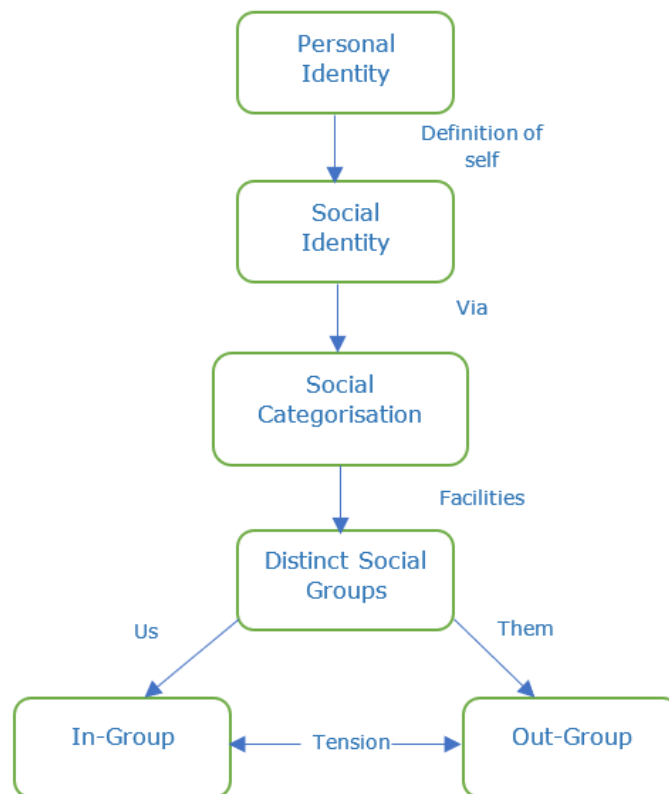
Burke (1991) infers that a person seeks to verify identity through interaction using four main components of verification; the identity standard, perceptual

inputs, comparator, and behavioural outputs (Burke and Stets, 2009). Therefore, a person responds in ways that support the identity standard (or perceived membership identity) from the perceptual inputs, and through self-reflected appraisal (Srivastava, 2012). Reflected appraisals are defined as an individual's perception of how others view them within a situation (Gecas and Burke, 1995). Stets and Trettevik (2014) suggest that when a given situation positively aligns with a person's identity standard and reflected appraisal then identity verification is achieved, which elicits positive emotion and behaviour. On the other hand, where non-verification is achieved, e.g., there is significant distance between the identity standard and the reflected appraisal, this results in negative emotion and behaviour (Stets, 2006). The participants within Leonard et al. (2017) study may well have had an experience of non-verification within their employment context as an older apprentice, which would go some way in explaining their negative emotion towards having the identity of an apprentice. In contrast to identity theory, social identity theory rejects the notion that construes group/membership influences as a source of irrationality, a 'deindividuation' caused through 'submergence' within a group (Postmes and Spears, 1998). Instead, Haslam (2004) argues social identity theory sees group influences as regulated by a different level of self, a higher order, more socially inclusive self, a change of self, but not a loss of self. Previous studies have defined 'self' on the characteristics associated with their respective membership of a group (Reicher and Stott, 2011).

Moreover, social identity theory assumes and describes how the process of an individual enacts social cohesion, cooperation, and influence, which is made possible because human beings can go beyond their individual identity, more generally, a person is able to act both as an individual as well as a group member (Haslam, 2004). Furthermore, Turner et al. (1994) states that social identity processes always take place in a social context and is shaped by social structural realities and 'intergroup relationships'; and understand how people define their social identities, and interaction between their collective psychology as group members, this was demonstrated effectively in the study conducted by Brockmann et al. (2021), especially in the STEM related sectors that cultivated a culture of learning that encouraged intergroup relationships, this was similarly evident from Fletcher (2022) study where solicitors apprentices are to cross-boundaries across the training provider and within their respective organisation. Tajfel and Turner (1979) proposes that the groups (e.g., social class, family, race, gender and so forth) which people belong to are an important source of pride and self-esteem, that being part of a group provides a sense of social

identity and belonging to the social world. More recent studies have argued that social identity is not solely formed on the social perception of others, it provides a framework from which individuals can associate to and make sense of, and can have a shared social identification (Hackel, Coppin, Wohl, and Van Bavel, 2018; Reicher and Hopkins, 2016). As individuals form groups, they are processing similarities between their shared values, goals, human factors (e.g., race, gender), interests, and once a group is constructed this becomes known as 'in-group' or 'us,' (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Contrastingly, 'out-group' or 'them' are outside of an individual's 'in-group,' and one in which they do not identify with, this can form negative emotion and behaviour between 'in-group' and 'out-group' members (Tajfel et al., 1979); thus, not a loss of self, but a different level or change of self (Haslam, 2004). Like Fuller et al. (2015), Brockmann and Laurie (2016) seem to suggest that their participants had an established 'in-group', in which they saw themselves as practical learners and non-academic. Therefore, one could assume that those participants may have negative emotion about whom they regard as academic 'out-group' members of society. Fuller et al. (2015) study demonstrated an 'in-group' based on age, the participants within the study that were aged 25+, found the notion of being labelled as an apprentice amusing due to their perception that apprenticeships are for school leavers and 'young people', which enacted an initial negative response in terms of becoming an apprentice.

Fuller et al. (2015) description of an employee who is also an apprentice, as having a dual identity as worker and learner creates a theoretical tension between the concept of 'in-group' and 'out-group' (see figure 2). It is unclear what change of self or emotion this has on a person who has a dual identity within the context Fuller et al. (2015) describes; especially if the employee also shares any of the previous discussed studies where the perceptions were that an apprenticeship is for 'younger' (Fuller et al., 2015), 'non-academic' (Brockmann and Laurie, 2016), and 'junior positions' (Leonard et al., 2017) within an organisation.



**FIGURE 2:** TAJFEL (1970) SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY: ILLUSTRATION

Haslam (2004, pg. 16) states that

*"Organizations are social structures, and how people orient and define themselves psychologically in relation to and within these social structures is fundamental to understanding how they will feel, think, and act."*

Katz and Kahn (1966, pg. 2)

*"Note that organisations have classically been defined as 'social device [s] for efficiently accomplishing through group means some stated purpose."*

Haslam (2004) refers to Statt (1994) definition of three core features of an organisation; a group with a social identity (providing a shared sense of belonging (LaTendresse, 2000)), expected organisational behaviour that is structured, and goal/target oriented, which was demonstrated by STEM sectors in Brockmann et al. (2021), and with the Law sector in Fletcher (2022) separate explorations. Haslam (2004) suggests that being part of an organisation is to be part of a membership, more directly, employees have a sense of 'in-group'. Referring to figure 2, Haslam (2004) view of a social identity theory in terms of



belonging to an organisation, in addition to the previous discussion regarding Fuller et al. (2015) categorisation of a dual identity suggests a possible further consideration in terms of the impact on an existing employee's identity when they become an apprentice.

Apprenticeships are well understood to be a mixture of on and off the job learning, usually the off the job element will involve a day release or at least participation with a group of apprentices that are from another organisation. As Haslam (2006) rightly points out, many individuals that are part of an organisation often are part of other groups, such as a sports team, church etc. However, these groups are quite separate and often do not impinge on the organisation, whereas an apprenticeship innately and intrinsically does directly impact on the apprentice's ability, behaviour, contribution, and participation within an organisational structure. The very nature of an apprenticeship will require a 'mixing' of both the organisational in-group and that of the off the job training membership. From the literature thus far, it suggests that an apprentice would go through the processes in figure 2 in two instances: one as an employee, and the other as part of an apprenticeship training programme. This starts to raise the question regarding how the two instances of social identity theory interrelate or co-exist. Considering the recent study by Drury and Reicher (2020), the concept of an 'extended in-group' was discussed, this was in the context of how crowds and collective behaviour of groups of people can impulsively act together in socially meaningful ways. This study demonstrated how the co-existence of a variety of groups can be formed, in that the interests pursued in a crowd situation are not based on individual interests but those of the collective group (Drury and Reicher, 2020). Moreover, regarding identity and social identity theories, the literature that draws upon previous apprenticeship studies alongside well-established theoretical concepts produced some interesting gaps in knowledge, which coherently align to the research objectives. There are overarching differences in identity theory and social identity theory which originated in two aspects: a 'group' or 'who one is' as the basis for identity (Psychology), and the other being the emphasis on 'role' or 'what one does' (Sociology) (Thoits and Virshup, 1997). As this research is interested more from an educational perspective, the basis of this thesis settles on Stets and Burke (2000, pg. 243) conclusion of both theories which states

*"That being and doing are both central features of one's identity."*

It is clear from identity theory that an employee's preconception of apprenticeships is likely to be shaped from perceptual inputs from their previous

or current group identity, or from their own formed 'identity meanings' that have developed over time (Stets and Burke, 2014; Stets and Serpe, 2013, Stets, 2018). Wenger (1998, pg. 169) framed this as:

*"An identity is a trajectory in time that incorporates both past and future into the meaning of the present."*

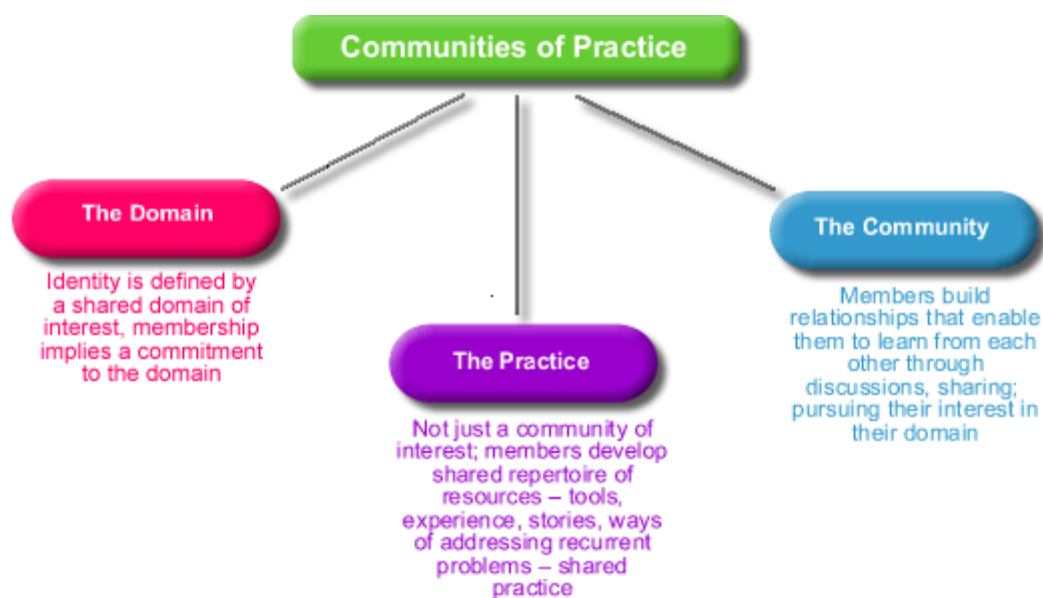
Social identity theory suggests that an individual may have negative emotions towards a group that they are not part of, therefore it again is likely that an existing employee will have a particular emotion towards membership of an apprenticeship group, the literature suggests that this will elicit a behavioural response, which could derive from an individual's reflected appraisal of a particular encounter (Gecas and Burke, 1995), however, it remains unclear what form that response will take, and more importantly the impact of that response as both an employee and an apprentice. It remains unclear how the notion of a dual identity as a worker and learner is formed and how the different interrelated memberships of both on and off-the-job experience link or whether there is tension between the 'in-groups.' There is some evidence (Drury and Reicher, 2020) that suggests that an 'extended in-group' could be formed through a shared belief/goal in a crowd situation, which united a diverse set of groupings, which may suggest a dual identity could be possible if there is a shared ambition, without the loss of 'self' or an individual's other 'in-group' memberships (Haslam, 2004). Finally, the notion of dual identity as a worker and learner is more complexed and is highly dependent on the features of any specific organisational context (Turner and Haslam, 2001), and the effectiveness of an employee's situated learning.

### **3.2 Situated learning**

Situated learning theory is described by Lave and Wenger (1991) as a process which takes place through legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice, which Lave and Wenger (1991) describes as how a newcomer becomes an experienced member, and eventually old timers within a community of practice or collaborative project. They categorised situated learning theory as embedded in everyday activity, context, culture and is essentially social. They go further by stating that these occurrences are frequently unintentional and progressive in terms of engagement and participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991). More directly, a community of practice:

*"Is a collection of people who engage on an ongoing basis in some common endeavour,"* (Eckert, 2006, pg. 1).

Linking back to Turner and Haslam (2001) point regarding the effectiveness of an organisational in cultivating positive membership through concrete features of an organisational context. Wenger et al. (2002) suggests that communities of practice should be a feature of an organisation to help drive strategy, introduce new lines of service, solve problems quickly and transfer best practices (Wenger and Snyder, 2000); they go further by stating that organisations could cultivate communities of practice to foster knowledge sharing, learning, and change. Within Mills (2011) research used the situated learning conceptual framework as a model of learning in a community of practice. Mills (2011) framed the research through the lens of a constructivist apprenticeship study. Mills (2011) argues that situated learning support apprentices or 'newcomers' to assimilate norms, behaviour, values, relationships, and beliefs. Moreover, because of situated learning, apprentices could make better connections to the course content because of being part of a community of practice. Lave and Wenger (1991) accentuated the importance of communities of practice to support the development of relationships and interactions between 'newcomers' and 'old-timers' or more knowledgeable others. They suggest that this is to frame learning as a dynamic process of guidance, support, and co-construction or re-conceptualisation of practice, and define three core elements: domain, practice, and community, see figure 3 (Lave and Wenger 1991).



**FIGURE 3:** SITUATED LEARNING MODEL (LAVE AND WENGER, 1991)

Referring to figure 3, Eckert (2006) suggests that situated learning theory offers individuals who have a shared **domain** of interest with new ways of

conceptualising and studying through co-construction and shared **practice**, were members build professional relationships to learn from each other in a **community**, particularly in non-classroom-based settings, e.g., a workplace. Fuller and Unwin (2003) suggest a shortcoming in Lave and Wenger's (1991) concepts, namely legitimate peripheral participation, and communities of practice.

*"Lave and Wenger's account of learning is that it does not include a role for formal education institutions in the newcomer's learning process,"*  
(Fuller and Unwin, 2003, pg. 408).

Fuller and Unwin (2003) go further to state that the formal, off-the-job educational case studies referred to add little to the process of learning via legitimate peripheral participation in a community of practice or even, as having a detrimental effect. Fuller and Unwin (2003) justify their review using an evidenced-base through their own research of the apprenticeship model, which demonstrate a combination of formal off-the-job and on-the-job learning, where they observed pedagogic instruction, which is absent from Lave and Wenger (1991) situated learning model in figure 3.

They referenced Guile and Young (1999, pg. 114) who stated

*"Approaches derived from cultural anthropology (such as Lave and Wenger) do not discuss theories of instruction and present apprenticeship as not dependent upon any formal teaching."*

Moreover, Fuller and Unwin (2003) argue that, Lave and Wenger (1991) concept of 'learning as participation' works well for the sorts of traditional craft-based activities, but less convincingly for the multifaceted industrial and commercial settings. Fuller and Unwin (2003) case study material indicate the importance of the configuration of informal and formal learning processes for understanding the quality of the teaching and learning environments in apprenticeships. To make sense of the lived reality of apprentices, they categorised types of apprenticeships as either expansive or restrictive, figure 4.

EXPANSIVE	RESTRICTIVE
Participation in multiple communities of practice inside and outside the workplace	Restricted participation in multiple communities of practice
Primary community of practice has shared 'participative memory': cultural inheritance of apprenticeship	Primary community of practice has little or no 'participative memory': no or little tradition of apprenticeship
Breadth: access to learning fostered by cross-company experiences built in to programme	Narrow: access to learning restricted in terms of tasks/knowledge/location
Access to range of qualifications including knowledge-based vocational qualifications	Access to competence-based qualification only
Planned time off-the-job including for college attendance and for reflection	Virtually all-on-job: limited opportunities for reflection
Gradual transition to full participation	Fast—transition as quick as possible
Apprenticeship aim: rounded expert/full participant	Apprenticeship aim: partial expert/full participant
Post-apprenticeship vision: progression for career	Post-apprenticeship vision: static for job
Explicit institutional recognition of, and support for, apprentices' status as learner	Ambivalent institutional recognition of, and support for, apprentice's status as learner
Named individual acts as dedicated support to apprentices	No dedicated individual ad-hoc support
Apprenticeship is used as a vehicle for aligning the goals of developing the individual and organisational capability	Apprenticeship is used to tailor individual capability to organisational need
Apprenticeship design fosters opportunities to extend identity through boundary crossing	Apprenticeship design limits opportunity to extend identity: little boundary crossing experienced
Reification of apprenticeship highly developed (eg through documents, symbols, language, tools) and accessible to apprentices	Limited reification of apprenticeship, patchy access to reificatory aspects of practice

**FIGURE 4:** THE EXPANSIVE–RESTRICTIVE CONTINUUM (FULLER AND UNWIN, 2003)

Fuller and Unwin (2003) argues that an apprenticeship characterised by the features listed as expansive will create a stronger and richer learning environment than apprenticeship experiences that are restrictive. Böhn and Deutscher (2022) cross-sector study of apprenticeships, demonstrated similar features to the restrictive continuum as the main reasons for such a substantial proportion of apprenticeship withdrawals. Unlike Böhn and Deutscher (2022) approach of cross-examining current secondary research, Fuller and Unwin (2003) used evidence collected from three companies providing apprenticeships, to identify the experiences of apprentices, including the opportunities and barriers to learning, their research highlights institutional arrangements, including the nature of the employment relationship and the formal qualifications required by the programme. Their overall findings suggest that the now legacy

modern apprenticeship do little to develop the character of apprentices, they do not comment on whether the three companies within their study adopted an expansive or restrictive approach to apprenticeships, but instead argued that their conclusion is based on

*"a deeper historical, socio-cultural, organisational and economic processes which it is hard for an externally conceived, and essentially bolt-on intervention, to penetrate,"* (Fuller and Unwin, 2003, pg. 424).

These findings share similarities with Cedefop (2020), who found that the standards of apprenticeships differ according to the age of the apprentice; one apprenticeship standard for young people and one for mature apprentices. The findings also aligned well to Gambin and Hogarth (2016) research which found the main factors related to apprenticeship achievement and completion was dependant on the apprentice's gender and demographics.

Fuller and Unwin (2003) stated that they were disappointed that the government did not put more focus on off-the-job learning during the era of the modern apprenticeship, however since the reforms in 2015, arguably the off-the-job component of the apprenticeship has less focus with some apprenticeship standards requiring no formal qualification to achieve the apprenticeship standard. Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015) reviewed a body of literature, which addresses the concern that, Fuller and Unwin (2003) stated, through exploring theory, and experiences of those engaged with communities of practice from a range of contributors based within different learning contexts, including apprenticeship on and off-the-job training. Moreover, they identified that whilst the communities of practice they examined were productive, there was too much focus on single communities of practice, which resulted in missed opportunities to link the communities of practice that existed across an individual's educational and organisational landscape. Similarly, other research from previous studies regarding dual identity (Fuller et al., 2015; Brockmann and Laurie, 2016), highlighted uncertainty of how interrelated memberships of both on and off-the-job experiences can co-exist (Tajfel, 1970; Thoits and Virshup, 1997). Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015) also recognised this by emphasising the importance of integrating communities of practice which they classified as crossing boundaries.

Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015, pg. 17) state that

*"Boundaries are places of potential misunderstanding and confusion arising from different regimes of competence, commitments, values, repertoires, and perspectives. In this sense, practices are like mini cultures."*

Wenger (1998) first introduced the concept of crossing boundaries between communities of practice when he stated the process of 'a weaving of both boundaries and peripheries' (pg. 118) between communities of practice.

Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015, Pg. 152) builds on this by stating that

*"Crossing boundaries requires identity work – revising, maintaining, and strengthening a sense of self as coherent and distinctive whilst negotiating identity and aligning with differing regimes of competence in different parts of the landscape"*

In contrast to some other socialisation theories (e.g., Vygotsky, 1978) which expect a reasonably smooth reproduction of communities over time, Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015) recognised there is intense emotions frequently experienced by individuals during boundary transitions and reproductions of communities of practice, which appear to link to similar experiences of apprenticeships in Fuller et al. (2015), Brockmann and Laurie (2016) research where older apprentices elicited negative emotions of the concept of being part of an 'out-group' of young people (Tajfel, 1970). Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015) argues for the need to make boundaries the focus of exploration by viewing them as learning assets, to identify how the perspective of one practice is relevant to that of another, and to ensure connections between the communities are highlighted.

Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015, pg. 18) suggest the following questions when bridging boundaries:

1. *"What kind of boundary activity, joint project, visit, mutual storytelling or learning partnership can serve as a productive encounter for negotiating and exploring a boundary?"*
2. *"How can boundaries be used systematically to trigger a reflection process about the practices on either side?"*
3. *"What kind of boundary objects and activities can support this boundary-oriented pedagogy and create points of focus for engaging multiple perspectives?"*
4. *"Who can act as brokers to articulate regimes of competence across boundaries?"*

Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015) describes the broker as a 'systems convener', they suggest that this is the individual(s) who take the leadership of creating lasting change across social and institutional systems, the systems convener

*"Seek to reconfigure social systems through partnerships that exploit mutual learning needs, possible synergies, various kinds of relationships, and common goals across traditional boundaries,"* (pg. 100).

Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015) suggests that the principle of asking these questions through a systems convener is to systematically bring together

multiple voices that reflect the structure of the landscape. If conducted sensitively it can provide opportunities to shape the communities of practice using the experiences from each practice to formulate a shared understanding. Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015) provides a framework which supports the crossing of boundaries which is an asset to this study, however they conclude through highlighting evidence that they believe deserve more attention with regards to identity:

1. *"The challenges of developing resilient and dynamic identities in relation to multiple communities of practice"*
2. *"The emotional consequences of threats to identity engendered by perceptions of failure and incompetence in transitions across boundaries"*
3. *"The provisional and temporary nature, for many learners, of their engagement and alignment with academic practices"*

(Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015, pg. 152)

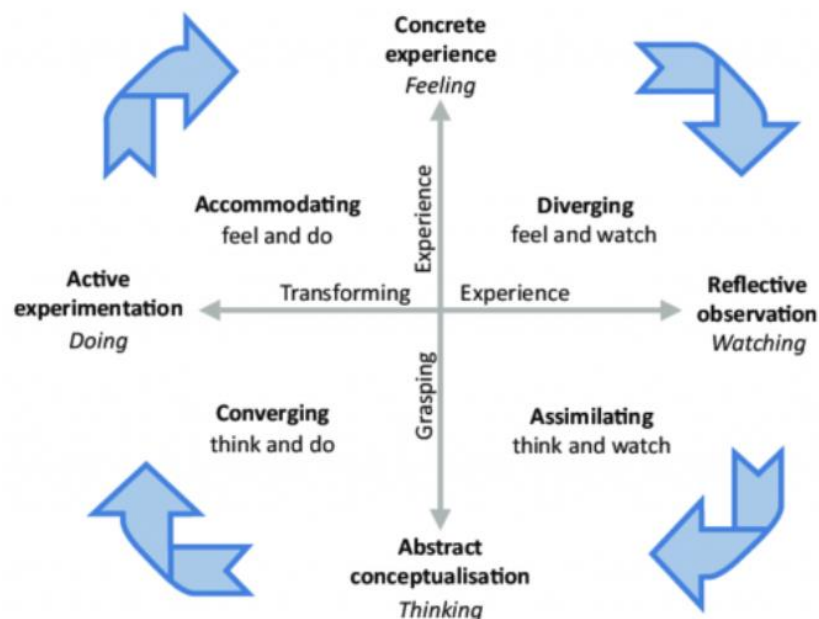
Whilst this body of literature is extremely insightful and provides a framework for addressing boundaries, there remains a gap in knowledge with regards to the impact on pre-existing and new communities of practice for an employee when they become an apprentice. Fuller and Unwin (2015) research elegantly builds on Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015), especially the requirement to focus on the whole apprenticeship when conducting research, on and off-the job learning. Furthermore, Fuller and Unwin (2015) recommendation of developing communities of practices by using the identification of the expansive–restrictive continuum provides a valuable framework to further develop within this thesis. There are similarities between the experiences from Fuller and Unwin (2015), and Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015) findings in terms of social identity theory, in particular the emotions experienced from participants that move between communities of practice, or 'in-group' (Tajfel, 1970; Turner and Haslam, 2001). However, both Fuller and Unwin (2015), and Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015) agree with support from a 'systems convener' (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015) or 'named person' (Fuller and Unwin, 2015) there is much to be gained for an individual that is part of multiple communities of practice, both on and off-the-job. The term 'old timers' used by Lave and Wenger (1991) to categorise experienced existing employees is not helpful, especially considering the increase in the number of mature employees that are using the apprenticeship route to upskill. This use of language is further problematic as much of the negative perceptions of apprenticeships from more experienced individuals is focused on the fact that they believe that apprenticeships are for young people or junior staff (Fuller et al., 2015; Leonard et al., 2017; Cedefop, 2020). Therefore, the use of language will be well considered and developed as part of



this thesis and subsequent outputs. Finally, whilst experiential learning was evident throughout the studies discussed within situated learning, it was not focused on, and moreover, how it was used to support existing staff that become an apprentice to make progress and achieve.

### 3.3 Experiential Learning

Experiential learning theory situated life experience as a necessary and essential part of the learning process, Kolb (2015, pg. 49) defined this as “*knowledge is created through the transformation of experience*”. Kolb’s definition shares some similarities with Dewey (1963, pg. 25) who proposed that “*all genuine education comes about through experience*”. Despite the common links with apprenticeships, compared to other areas of education, according to Bergsteiner et al. (2010) and Jarvis (2012) there has been limited empirical research conducted on experiential learning. Kolb (1984) ELT theory shows that for individuals to be effective in learning through experience, four aptitudes are required (see figure 5), namely ‘**concrete experience**’; individuals must be able to involve themselves fully and openly without bias in the new experiences, ‘**reflective observation**’; be able to reflect on and observe their experiences from a variety of perspectives, ‘**abstract conceptualisation**’; be able to create ideas that integrate their observations into logical comprehensive theories, ‘**active experimentation**’; be able to use these theories to make decisions and problem solve.



**FIGURE 5:** EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CYCLE, KOLB (1984)

The four-stage learning cycle concrete experiences are the source for observations and reflections. Reflections are assimilated and refined into abstracts concepts which results in new thinking which can be tested through active experimentation. The experience of 'doing' and cycles of reflection, enable an individual to accommodate the learning from this experience. The processes of assimilating and accommodating knowledge is derived from Piagetian learning theory (Piaget, 1936 and 1957). Assimilation being the integration of new objects or new situations and events into previous schemes (Steffe, 1991). This occurs when an individual fits in an experience into a conceptual structure that was developed between reflective observation and abstract conceptualisation in the learning cycle. Accommodation is the process of changing the cognitive structures developed from abstract conceptualisation through an individual grasping and experience the latest ideas. During the active experimentation stage, a modification of a schema occurs due to perturbation and disequilibrium (Von Glasersfeld, 1995). From this, an individual might modify the activity of the schema, modify the instigation criteria for the schema by forming a recognition pattern including the new characteristic, or modify the expected result (Von Glasersfeld, 1995). Once the process of accommodation is complete the individual will reach a stage of equilibrium, whereby the knowledge is accommodated into their schema.

According to Kolb (1976), there are two continuums which are illustrated in figure 5 as the east-west axis, called the 'processing continuum' (how one approaches a task), and the north-south axis, the 'perception continuum' (one's emotional response, or how one thinks or feel about it). Kolb (1976) believed that individuals cannot 'think' and 'feel' at the same time, e.g., perform both variables on a single axis simultaneously, therefore an individual most chose to act on one of them. The theory of learning style is a product of these two choice decisions, Kolb (1984) research on ELT theory identified four prevalent learning styles that impact on the ability of individual cognitive learning when engagement during the four-stage learning cycles. These include **Diverging**, **Assimilating**, **Converging**, and **Accommodating**.

Diverging learning abilities are dominant in concrete experience and reflective observation of the learning cycle. Kolb (1984) suggests that individuals with a diverging learning style area best at viewing concrete situations from different points of view and are therefore able to generate innovative ideas through working in groups, listening with an open mind, and processing feedback. The assimilating learning style is foremost at abstract conceptualisation and

reflective observation. Kolb (1984) attributes this to a person's ability to understand a wide range of information and interpreting it into a concise and logical form. Individual with a converging learning style perform best during abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). These individuals are best at identifying practical uses for latest ideas and theories, they tend to prefer to learn through technical tasks and problems. Finally, those who have the accommodating learning style are dominant in concrete experience and active experimentation, Kolb (1984) suggests that this is because those individuals learn from a hands-on experience rather than logical analysis. Conversely, these individuals rely heavily on people for information rather than their own technical analysis. Several scholars identified some shortcomings with Kolb's (1984) ELT cycle, Miettinen (2000, pg. 65) states that Kolb (1984) interpretation of ELT:

*"Gives a unilateral and erroneous picture of the original theories"*  
(Dewey, 1963; Lewin, 1957; Piaget, 1957)

Miettinen (2000) goes further by suggesting that each stage of the ELT cycle does not connect in any organic or necessary way. Bergsteiner et al. (2010) also describe Kolb's ELT theory as highly muddled. Kolb (2015) draws attention to a study by Eisenstein and Hutchinson (2006) which involved a service of experiments that examined performance of individuals after repeated decision making with outcome feedback which they called 'action-based' or 'experiential learning'. This study concluded that there should be a decrease on the reliance of experience, and instead there should be an increase in the use of objective analyses. Kolb (2015, pg.14) explains that:

*"When experiential learning is defined as a naturalistic ongoing process of direct learning from life experiences contrasted with the systematic learning of formal science and education, the picture that emerges is that experiential learning is haphazard, unreliable, and misleading, and it must be corrected by academic knowledge."*

Kolb (2015, pg. 14) further defines the aim of ELT as:

*"a theory that helps explain how experience is transformed into learning and reliable knowledge. Truth is not manifest in experience; it must be inferred by a process of learning that questions preconceptions of direct experience, tempers the vividness and emotion of experience with critical reflection, and extracts the correct lessons from the consequences of action."*

Despite this further clarification, Seaman et al. (2017) has since stated that Kolb's model presents as a barrier to a clearer understanding and successful facilitation of experiential learning. Seaman et al. (2017) accepts that Kolb's ELT remains the most principle and influential model in the field of experiential learning. Seaman

et al. (2017) suggests that the key issue with the model is the interpretation of what is meant by a concrete experience. This was also highlighted by Blenkinsop et al. (2016) who suggests that many educators will not consider reading a book or attending a traditional lecture a concrete experience or part of experiential learning, whereas some educationalists would. Contrastingly to Bergsteiner et al. (2010) and Jarvis (2012) assertion that there has been limited empirical research conducted on experiential learning, Kolb (2015) states that there have been many studies using ELT especially in management, business, information science, psychology, health related disciplines and education. One such study was conducted by Ritchie (2011) which researched into the relevance of experiential learning to apprentices in the commercial and industrial market, through examining the four elements of the experiential learning cycle with apprentices at Volkswagen Group and Airbus. Both the Volkswagen Group and Airbus apprenticeship programmes scaffold their apprenticeships around Kolb's ELT.

According to Ritchie (2011), the principle of this framing was to provide greater challenge to apprentices, which in-turn ignites greater reflection and theorising, resulting in a greater intensity of the learning experience. Ritchie (2011) suggests that this approach enabled the apprentices to learn new skills, new attitudes, or even an entirely new way of thinking. Ritchie (2011) found that experiential learning was a cost-effective extension of in-house apprenticeship development programmes with apprentices demonstrating an increase in motivation, improvement in self-awareness and personal responsibility. One of the most interesting factors within Ritchie (2011) study was the lack of reference to learning styles, the greater focus was on the four stages of the learning cycle, and the experience of 'doing' and 'reflecting'. The other noteworthy factor was the use of highly skilled facilitators, which aligned well to Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015) description of a 'systems convener' or 'named person' (Fuller and Unwin, 2015) which supported the learning progress using ELT. Ritchie (2011) demonstrated how diverse groups of apprentices can become part of an extended in-group using ELT and systems conveners. Furthermore, it was an example where through a shared goal and the correct conditions, a diverse set of groupings can form an effective community of practice, or in-group membership (Drury and Reicher, 2020).

Similarly, Fletcher (2019) paper on experiential learning and experience of learning through vocational education examined the main themes and perspectives of an apprenticeship as a model of learning. Fletcher (2019) focused on an apprenticeship model adopted by the solicitors regulatory

authority as a pathway for intending solicitors who wish to qualify. Fletcher (2019) suggests for the workplace and classroom activities to be brought together, the experiences and learning from both should be aligned with experiential learning. In addition, Fletcher (2019) highlights the importance of group learning, or community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991), to enable apprentices to construct and develop their knowledge by interacting and interpreting their individual experiences with qualified colleagues. The body of literature provided some evidence (Ritchie, 2011; Fletcher, 2019) that Kolb's (1984) ELT can be effective if there is a clear structure (Fletcher, 2019) in place between the workplace and the learning provider. This lack of structure was apparent in the research that Miettinen (2000) and Bergsteiner et al. (2010) examined, and in the absence of such a structure, the connection between each stage of the ELT cycle does not coherently align in any organic or necessary way (Miettinen, 2000). This literature has also highlighted that a successful apprenticeship programme is highly dependent on the features of any specific organisational context (Turner and Haslam, 2001).

The purpose of a 'clear structure' aligns to Fuller and Unwin (2003) expansive–restrictive continuum which describes that an expansive apprenticeship creates a stronger and richer learning environment than those that are restrictive. Moreover, this body of literature also points to the need of a systems convener (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015)/named person (Fuller and Unwin, 2003), a person who exhibits diverging learning abilities to effectively bring diverse groups of apprentices together, to create an extended in-group membership (Drury and Reicher, 2020) and community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) under a shared goal. What remains unclear is to what extent apprentices are made part of the learning journey on an apprenticeship programme, for example, are apprentices given agency to shape an apprenticeship programme or are they aware of how experiential learning is being used to support them to make progress.

### **3.4 Literature Review Conclusion**

From reviewing a large body of literature and previous studies, the emerging themes of discussion could be categorised into three overarching themes, namely social identity, membership, and experiential learning. Table 3 provides the links to each of these themes from the literature review and respective theorists.

**TABLE 3:** KEY THEMES AND LINKS TO LITERATURE

<b>Key Theme</b>	<b>Links</b>
<b>Social Identity</b>	<p>Fuller et al. (2015) identify apprentices as having a dual identity as workers and learners (Heikkinen and Lassmigg, 2015).</p> <p>McCall and Simmons (1978) adopt a multiple self and identity perspective and use the language of identity prominence, or hierarchies of prominence to describe significant variations in an individual's identity.</p> <p>Haslam (2004) argues social identity theory sees group influences as regulated by a different level of self, a higher order, more socially inclusive self, a change of self, but not a loss of self.</p> <p>Previous studies have defined 'self' on the characteristics associated with their respective membership of a group (Reicher and Stott, 2011).</p> <p>Turner et al. (1994) states that social identity processes always take place in a social context and is shaped by social structural realities and intergroup relationships.</p> <p>Tajfel and Turner (1979) proposes that the groups (e.g., social class, family, race, gender and so forth) which people belong to are an important source of pride and self-esteem, that being part of a group provides a sense of social identity and belonging to the social world.</p>
<b>Membership</b>	<p>More recent studies have argued that social identity is not solely formed on the social perception of others, it provides a framework from which individuals can associate to and make sense of, and can have a shared social identification (Hackel, Coppin, Wohl, and Van Bavel, 2018; Reicher and Hopkins, 2016).</p>

As individuals form groups, they are processing similarities between their shared values, goals, human factors (e.g., race, gender), interests, and once a group is constructed this becomes known as 'in-group' or 'us' (Tajfel and Turner, 1979).

Contrastingly, 'out-group' or 'them' are outside of an individual's 'in-group,' and one in which they do not identify with, this can form negative emotion and behaviour between 'in-group' and 'out-group' members (Tajfel et al., 1979); thus, not a loss of self, but a different level or change of self (Haslam, 2004).

Fuller et al. (2015), Brockmann and Laurie (2016) findings seem to suggest that their participants had an established 'in-group', in which they saw themselves as practical learners and non-academic.

Haslam (2004) suggests that being part of an organisation is to be part of a membership, more directly, employees have a sense of 'in-group'.

The co-existence of a variety of groups can be formed, in that the interests pursued in a crowd situation are not based on individual interests but those of the collective group (Drury and Reicher, 2020).

Lave and Wenger (1991) describes how a newcomer becomes an experienced member, and eventually old timers within a community of practice or collaborative project.

Turner and Haslam (2001) state that the effectiveness of an organisation depends on the cultivating of positive membership through concrete features of an organisational context. Wenger et al. (2002) suggests that communities of practice should be a feature of an organisation to help drive strategy, introduce new lines of service, solve problems quickly and transfer best practices (Wenger and Snyder, 2000)

	<p>Wenger (1998) first introduced the concept of crossing boundaries between communities of practice when he stated the process of <i>'a weaving of both boundaries and peripheries'</i> (pg. 118) between communities of practice.</p> <p>A systems convener brings together multiple voices that reflect the structure of the landscape. If conducted sensitively it can provide opportunities to shape the communities of practice using the experiences from each practice to formulate a shared understanding (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015)</p> <p>Through a shared goal and the correct conditions, a diverse set of groupings can form an effective community of practice, or in-group membership (Drury and Reicher, 2020).</p>
<p><b>Experiential Learning</b></p>	<p><i>"Lave and Wenger's account of learning is that it does not include a role for formal education institutions in the newcomer's learning process,"</i> (Fuller and Unwin, 2003, pg. 408).</p> <p>The expansive–restrictive continuum (Fuller and Unwin, 2003). Fuller and Unwin (2003) argues that an apprenticeship characterised by the features listed as expansive will create a stronger and richer learning environment than apprenticeship experiences that are restrictive.</p> <p>Fuller and Unwin (2015), and Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015) agree with support from a 'systems convener' (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015) or 'named person' (Fuller and Unwin, 2015) there is much to be gained for an individual that is part of multiple communities of practice, both on and off-the-job.</p> <p><i>"Knowledge is created through the transformation of experience."</i> (Kolb, 2015, pg. 49)</p> <p>The use of highly skilled facilitators, which aligned well to Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015) description of a 'systems convener' or 'named person' (Fuller and Unwin, 2015) which</p>



supported the learning progress using ELT (Ritchie, 2011) on and off the job learning.

Brockmann et al. (2021) demonstrated the importance of an organisation's apprenticeship knowledge, in terms of what the purpose of an apprenticeship is, and the culture of learning that is required to ensure that both the apprentice and employer benefit from the training.

Fletcher (2019) suggests for the workplace and classroom activities to be brought together, the experiences and learning from both should be aligned with experiential learning.

Fletcher (2019, 2022) highlights the importance of group learning, or community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991), to enable apprentices to construct and develop their knowledge by interacting and interpreting their individual experiences with qualified colleagues.

Fuller and Unwin (2003) suggests the need for a named person who exhibits diverging learning abilities who can effectively bring diverse groups of apprentices together.

ELT can be effective if there is a clear structure (Fletcher, 2019) in place between the workplace and the learning provider.

Fuller and Unwin (2003, 2015) research appears across all themes thus demonstrating that their works has examined some aspects of social identity, situated and experiential learning, however the links are dispersed and are not examined as a collective focus of any study. The works by Fuller and Unwin will be referred to, especially their concept of the expansive–restrictive continuum, which will be built upon during the findings of this thesis. A common theme was the concept of a systems convener (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015) or named person (Fuller and Unwin, 2003) who is the individual that supports an apprentice to be part of multiple communities of practice, both on and off-the-job.

From the previous studies examined (Ritchie, 2011; Fletcher, 2019) they suggest using the experiential learning cycle as a framework to align on and off-the-job

training, resulting in improved outcomes. Furthermore, these studies highlight the importance of this process being collectively conducted between the employer, apprentice, and the training provider, without which the experiential learning cycle will become muddled and with no clear links to each stage of the learning cycle (Miettinen, 2000; Bergsteiner et al., 2010).

The features of how an organisation is structured was referred to on multiple occasions throughout the body of literature, namely in the context of 'social identity', as providing employees with having a sense of 'in-group' membership (Haslam, 2004); 'situated learning' as being effective in an organisation to cultivate positive membership through concrete features (Turner and Haslam, 2001) such as a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991); and 'apprenticeships' by providing an expansive space to create a stronger and richer learning environment (Fuller and Unwin, 2003). In addition, the importance of an organisational structure was also noted within Fletcher (2019) to enable apprentices to construct and develop their knowledge by interacting and interpreting their individual experiences with qualified colleagues. Social identity theory features across all studies in some capacity, however on most occasions there was no direct link made to it. For example, the concept of a dual identity was discussed within Fuller et al. (2015), and Heikkinen and Lassmigg (2015), without a considered link to social identity theory. There were clear links with the concept of a community of practice and in-group membership, as well as with the concept of crossing boundaries and an extended in-group membership with a shared goal or ambition (Drury and Reicher, 2020).

What remains unclear is to the extent that social identity, situated and experiential learning interlink through research conducted within an epistemological framework, all studies offered some links, but these were inferred rather than explicitly researched or discussed.

### **3.5 Research Questions**

Collectively, from completion of the literature review the following questions remain unresolved and will be methodically examined.

1. Do employees' preconceptions of an apprenticeship impact on their behaviour and social identity when they become an apprentice within their organisation?
  - a. Do employees' perceptions of their social identity change during the apprenticeship?
2. Does becoming an apprentice impact on pre-existing communities of practice or are new communities of practice formed?

3. Do the apprentices believe that experiential learning is being used to support them to make progress?
4. Does the apprentices' social identity, situated and experiential learning interlink, if so, how?

## Chapter Four Methodology

The term 'methodology' broadly refers to the philosophical framework in which research is conducted (Brown, 2006). Moreover, it encompasses the philosophical assumptions and underpinnings upon which research is based and the implications of these for the method or methods that are used to conduct the research (Saunders and Rojon, 2014), put more simply it is the development, examination, verification and refinement of research methods, procedures, techniques, and tools that form the body of a research methodology (Kumar, 2019). The research question and the philosophical approach (Figure 6) were fully considered within the methodology to encapsulate the research paradigm, research variables, methods, and data analysis.

### 4.1 Philosophical Approach

A philosophical approach deals with the source, nature, and development of knowledge (Levin, 1988; Bajpai, 2011). For example, an epistemology philosophical approach is widely understood to be the study of knowledge and is

*"a way of understanding and explaining how I know what I know"*  
(Crotty, 1998, pg.3).

Within this study the epistemological approach needed to consider the ontology of the stakeholders, namely, apprentices. Raelin (2000) explains that the epistemological tradition of work-based learning is referred to as the very foundation of what makes up knowledge itself. Crotty (1998) previously discussed epistemological stances, and suggested there are two opposing stances, objectivism, and subjectivism. Objectivism, as defined by Crotty (1998) is the belief that truth and meaning reside within an object and is independent of human subjectivity. Broadly, this stance is to remove all contextual factors and to understand that the phenomena exist independently of the human cognition, and that the removal of this leads to the discovery of knowledge. Thus, objectivity is said to negate subjectivity since it renders the observer a passive recipient of external information, Schultze (2000). Consequently, the acquisition of knowledge does not change regardless of who is studying the object. On the other hand, subjectivism results in the meaning being created through an interaction of the research and the participants (Crotty, 1998). Epistemological subjectivism is:

*"Always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity"* (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, pg. 21).

More directly, a phenomenon impacts on the interpretation as equally as the researcher's interpretation of the knowledge collected. Levers (2013, pg.4) explains this as:

*"The interpreter's observations are shaped by the phenomena and societal influences, and the interpreter is aware that her interpretations are influenced and does not claim to be discovering truth"*

Knowledge is therefore constructed rather than discovered. When one compares objectivism and subjectivism, it highlights that the approach for this research required creating meaning through the interactions with the participants to ensure that the research unswervingly is filtered through the lenses of societal interactions and contextual parameters. The initial outlined approach in figure 6 encapsulates this, and to provide a first attempt of a paradigm in which would elicit more insightful data on the apprentices' identity, and how being an apprentice impacts on the apprentices' reality; especially as an individual who has a previous lived experience as an employee before embarking on an apprenticeship. Recognising that the participants ontological stance will also be dependent upon their lived experiences.

Crotty (1998) defines ontology as a view of reality held about the situation in question. Bryman (2008) goes further by stating that one's ontological stance is rooted in personal belief of whether the social world exists externally to the stakeholders or whether it is a phenomenon that is shaped and fashioned by social factors. From the researcher's own experience of working in apprenticeships, he is aware that one apprentice's experience of their on-programme learning differs based on the social factors that influences their apprenticeship experience, such as the quality of on and off the job training, job satisfaction and their identity during the apprenticeship. Cohen et al (2001, pg. 6) develops on the Crotty's ontological definition further by asking the following questions:

*"Is social reality external to individuals – imposing itself on their consciousness from without – or is it the product of individual consciousness? Is reality of an objective nature, or the result of individual cognition? Is it a given 'out there' in the world, or is it created by one's own mind?"*

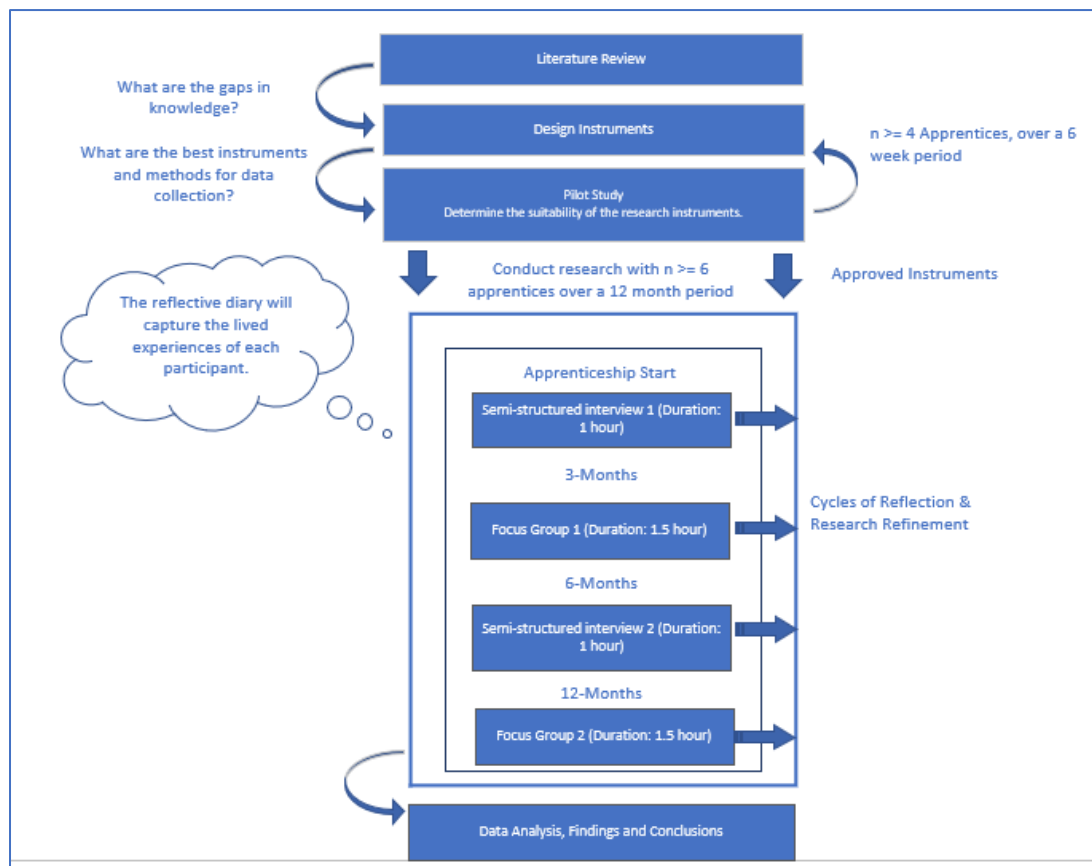
Arguably, an apprentice's reality and beliefs will differ according to their lived experience and social factors influencing their experience. Moreover, that reality is a contextual field of information (Morgan and Smircich, 1980), which changes based on the transmission of knowledge e.g., an apprentice's interaction with their context through employment and training which in turns shapes their either

positive or negative reality. Consequently, the reality of apprentices is not fixed purely on the fact that they are an apprentice, but their individual reality is more fluid and determined by a variety of factors, for example, cultural; social realities; quality of training; and support from employer. To attempt to illustrate the researcher's own philosophical standpoint and engagement in the research process, the initial philosophical paradigm identified in figure 6 was intended to provide a 'blueprint' for the entire inquiry (Grant and Osanloo, 2014). Moreover, the intention was to provide a suggested structure to the research approach in terms of philosophically, epistemologically, methodologically, and analytically.

This first attempt to produce a philosophical paradigm was to accept that the researcher has a subjectivist stance, in that the researcher is not able to be completely objective due to their own schema, and to also anticipate that there could be no single truth that addresses the research questions, instead it is likely that the apprentices' reality will differ according to contextual factors, and it is these factors that are of interest to this research. Figure 6 addresses this through using an iterative design process that enabled the research materials to be tested through a pilot study with participants who were currently or previously an apprentice within the last twelve months. This approach enables an emic viewpoint from studying the behaviour from inside the system as opposed to an etic viewpoint, Pike (1967). By creating research materials that are shaped by participants (Yin, 2010) to:

*"Look at things through the eyes of members of the culture being studied" (Willis, 2007, pg.100)*

The intention was to allow the researcher to gain more qualitative knowledge by using these co-constructed research materials directly within the apprentices' reality. This was to provide results through the ontological lens that is of critical realism, this is a branch of philosophy that distinguishes between the real world and observable world (Archer, 1998). The real world cannot be observed and exist independent from one's own perception, theories, and constructions; this influenced the paradigm for this study, which in-turn also tested the researcher's preconceptions.



**FIGURE 6:** PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH – INITIAL OUTLINE

This study focuses on a qualitative approach to data collection, and as Bazeley (2013) suggests qualitative researchers prefer to use their participants' words and use 'thick descriptions' which is to look beyond the mere facts and surface appearance of what is being discussed. Therefore, this study attempts to capture responses through a constructivist perspective to frame the epistemological approach of constructing knowledge through the participants' perceptions, lived experiences, and social involvements (Bazeley, 2013).

#### 4.2 Ethical Considerations

The research has been conducted in accordance with Nottingham Trent University's ethical framework, ethical approval and associated documentation can be found in appendix one. This research focused on adults aged 18 and over, all of which were employed, this study therefore aimed to collect and analyse primary data about living human beings, as a result, ethical approval was requested and subsequently approved by the University's School Research Ethic Committee. The society's code of ethical practice that is most relevant is with the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018). The British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) states that researchers have the

responsibility to ensure that all participants are made aware of the purpose of the research that is being undertaken. In addition, the well-being of the participants is also highlighted and should be innately considered within the research that is being conducted.

The BERA (2018) guidelines make it clear that all research must be conducted ethically, and in compliance with the BERA regulations. All participants should have the right to not participate, withdraw, and be anonymised if they decide to take part in a study. Finally, participants should be made aware of what the research is going to be used for, and of any future publications that derive from the study. To abide with BERA (2018) guidelines and to Nottingham Trent University's ethical framework, organisations and participants involved within my study were anonymised (Coe et al., 2017). This included changing or omitting any identifying information in any write up of the research (Denscombe, 2017). All research data was stored centrally on the University's secure systems and only University systems were used to analyse the research findings. The audio recordings were deleted within one month from the date the recordings took place, this was to allow time for them to be transcribed. The anonymised transcripts will be archived for 10 years following publication of this thesis according to the University's Records Retention Schedule and then deleted from storage by the University's data management team.

A data management plan was also developed and approved to support with the management of the data in line with University's Records Retention Schedule. As a result, file and naming conventions were agreed when storing the data, and a secure location has been made available that is only accessible via a secure link. When initially engaging with participants to request their consent to engage with the research, all interested participants were sent a detailed information sheet and consent form. Collectively, this informed all participants of their rights including the right to not participate and withdraw from the study, the project's aim and objectives, data collections processes, how the data will be used, and details regarding how the research will be conducted to provide anonymity, and security of the research data. Participants could have withdrawn themselves and their data from the project before a set date. Participants were asked to email the researcher to inform him of their decision. The information sheet attempted to reassure the participants that they will not be asked to give any reason, and to inform them that their employment and apprenticeship will not be affected by their choice of participation within this study. The information sheet made it clear



with the participants that confidentiality was not guaranteed in the data collection, or within the outputs, due to group participation within focus group discussions where other participants might know the identity of the other participants. To minimise this risk participants were informed that they can choose to switch their cameras off. In addition, all participants were required to sign the consent form before engaging in this study, the consent stipulated that all participants must keep the identity of any of the other participants confidential. All recordings were transcribed, and then the recordings were deleted and erased from the University's systems in accordance with the University's Ethics code of practice. All transcripts were fully anonymised, any information that identified the participant, the organisation and apprenticeship provider were removed.

### **4.3 Research Methods**

Aligned to BERA's guidelines, the philosophical paradigm shown in figure 5 was used as a framework to conduct this qualitative study. After completing the literature review in chapters two and three, the research materials were designed based on several studies (Janssens et al., 2018; Leonard et al., 2017; Fuller and Unwin, 2003; Mills, 2011). These consisted of qualitative methods including:

- Reflective diary
- Semi-structured interviews
- Focus groups

Originally, questionnaires were omitted due to the range of research methods that were in place to gather the data, however, as a result of testing the methods in the pilot study (section 5.8), questionnaires were integrated into the data collection methods.

### **4.4 Reflective Diary**

The use of a reflective diary is a metacognitive process in which the participants can actively and purposefully consider their feelings, reactions, thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, responses, and experiences (Dewey, 1993). According to Salazar (2016) diary studies is a contextual qualitative longitudinal research method that captures participants' behaviours, activities, and experiences. This method serves one of two major purposes: the investigation of phenomena as they unfold over time, or the focused examination of specific, and often rare, phenomena (Salazar, 2016). The use of the diary method enables the

unpredictable phenomena that cannot be observed and an opportunity for the participants to record an account without the influence of the researcher being present (Zimmerman and Wieder, 1977).

Janssens et al. (2018) conducted a qualitative study which focused on 47 researchers from 12 different countries to determine the most suitable approach to designing a diary as a research instrument. Their study showed that there was no optimal design that can be relied upon since this is largely dependent upon the research question of the study. Janssens et al. (2018) suggests the following recommendations when considering the design of a reflective diary for the purpose of a research study: clear instructions, participant friendly language, a pilot study, providing a response to the comments made by the participants, use reliable items, good validity, succinct questions, and the use of an electronic diary. Alaszewski (2006) like Janssens et al. (2018) drew similar conclusions but went further by suggesting that the participants' understanding of the purpose of the reflective diary and instructions could be enhanced through a discussion with the participants before any entries are recorded. Keleher and Verrinder (2003) suggested that the use of a diary method within research should typically be no more than four weeks.

Verbrugge (1980) agrees with Keleher and Verrinder (2003) by suggesting that the use of a diary for the duration of a longitudinal study could induce response fatigue. The researcher has carefully considered the possibility of low-response rates and a reduced volume of data collection when using the diary method as it could become a burden for the participants (Alaszewski, 2006). This could be because of the pressure that is on each participant to complete their apprenticeship whilst also having to continue to work. Consequently, this research used a standard set of qualitative questions to explore and describe the phenomena (Maxwell, 2005). These questions would need to be sent at three key intervals, see figure 5, using a fixed signal-contingent protocol (Wheeler and Reis, 1991). During these intervals, the participants will receive an alert with several qualitative questions to capture their lived experience. Following Willis's (2007) approach, this would enable the researcher to provide timely responses to each diary entry to increase motivation and provide further structure if required. This method takes account of Keleher and Verrinder (2003) suggestion and Janssens et al. (2018) recommendation of providing comments in response to those made by each participant to increase their motivation for completing a diary entry.

Moreover, to avoid limiting the participants to just three key intervals, an event-contingent protocol would also be required (Wheeler and Reis, 1991). This would enable the participants to record any phenomena that occurs outside of the fixed signal-contingent protocol using a semi-structured diary entry to enable a critical experience to be recorded (Bolger et al., 2003). To conclude, a diary method will therefore require two protocols (table 4); one will be a structured set of qualitative questions and the other will be a semi-structured approach to avoid limiting the participants' contributions. Both protocols are required as part of a solicited diary study (Barlett and Milligan, 2015). The diary method would need to be developed online to ease of accessibility, and the diary questions would follow the framework of recommendations as outlined from Janssens et al. (2018) study.

**TABLE 4:** CONTINGENT PROTOCOLS – ADAPTED FROM JANSSENS ET AL. (2018)

<b>Protocol:</b>	<b>Triggered</b>	<b>Considerations</b>	<b>Potential Concerns</b>	<b>Mitigation</b>
<b>Event-contingent</b>	Triggered by the participant at any point during the apprenticeship journey	Semi-structured questions, needs to allow for more flexibility to enable a participant to capture the phenomena	Unpredictable in terms of frequency and consistency across all participants  May become difficult to analyse	The semi-structured questions need to be balanced to ensure that they do not over constrain a response but keep within the confine of the research
<b>Fixed signal-contingent</b>	Triggered by the researcher at each key interval	Structured qualitative questions	Could become a burden if triggered during a busy period for the participants	During the pilot study the most suitable trigger points within each interval will be identified

#### **4.5 Semi-structured Interviews**

Coe (2021) states that interviews are a purposeful method to data collection, through interactions in which the researcher attempts to learn about what the participants know about a topic, to discover and record the experiences of the participants, and to examine the significance and meaning of their responses. Coe (2021) further states that to gain meaning of a person's lived experiences, questions that are commonly used address the matters of 'what' and 'how', this approach is particularly important in qualitative research. Kvale (1996) states

that a semi-structured interview is a social, interpersonal encounter, not merely a data collection exercise (Qu and Dumay, 2011). Kvale (1996) identifies two approaches, namely, the 'miner' who is concerned to extract information, and the 'traveller', who co-constructs knowledge through going on a journey with the participant. Kvale (1996) recommends the traveller approach to ensure the issues can be explored in depth and to understand how and why people frame and make connections within their responses. Semi-structured interviews are often used within formal training and ongoing practice (Rabionet, 2011), to provide a scaffold of open-ended questions from which instigate a conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee. The use of semi-structured interviews invites the application of creativity and thoughtful reflexivity in relation to the broader ethical, methodological, and theoretical elements of research (Galletta, 2013). Due to the uncertainties caused by the Covid-19 pandemic the research design for this thesis was to conduct all research using an online platform e.g., Microsoft Teams. This did however provide an opportunity to extend this study's geographical reach, which is often restricted to the location of where a researcher is based (Carter et al., 2021). Conducting the research solely online also reduces the carbon footprint on the environment, reduces the costs associated to travel, and increases participation of individuals with mobility issues (Hewson, 2020).

Conversely, in a study conducted by Carter et al. (2021) whilst it highlighted all the previously noted benefits, it also suggests that online data collection could limit participation to only those with a web-enabled device with a good internet connection. In addition, Carter et al. (2021) state that often the responses from participants through an online media can be shorter, thus, limiting detail. Within the same study, Carter et al. (2021) further states that the drawbacks of conducting research online can be remedied through adapting research materials, including using other approaches, such as telephony, to conduct an interview. Following the suggestions of Carter et al. (2021), semi-structured interviews will be used to ensure that the researcher can explore the participants' responses further. According to Holt (2010) and Irvine et al. (2013), semi-structured interviews can assume a variety of formats and be deployed through a range of technologies. The main factor according to Bettez (2016), and Steward (2016) is not so much on the medium, but on the researcher's ability to create a format that maximises rapport with the participants, that elicits mutually beneficial outcomes.

Semi-structured interviews do provide an experienced researcher with the opportunity to gain a rich understanding of the study phenomenon (Polit and Beck, 2010), the main risk associated with this data collection method is the collection of data that is not completely necessary for the research (Gibbs et al., 2007). To limit this risk, a researcher must be mindful to avoid focussing on data that is not necessary and ensure to refocus the conversation back to the research objectives where the topic has moved outside of the research parameters (Galletta, 2012). Following a constructivist epistemological approach, and Kvale (1996) concept of a 'traveller', the use of semi-structured interviews allowed for knowledge to be co-constructed between the researcher and participant (Fontana and Frey, 2000). This form of rich data collection enabled some digression should a related, but unexpected line of enquiry present itself during the discussion.

#### **4.6 Focus Groups**

Coe (2021) states that focus groups are methods often used synonymously with a selected group of individuals to record the views about a research topic. Coe (2021) further states that focus groups are interactive, meaning that the group opinion is as important as an individual point of view; they are therefore suited to qualitative research. Morgan (1997) defines a focus group as a group interview, whereas Kitzinger (1994) distinguishes a focus group to be more than an interview, through the explicit use and examination of the group interaction as research data. Catterall and Maclaran (1997), goes further by stating that focus groups provide an insight into the participants' experiences, their values, and their interactions with the other participants. A focus group usually consists of a small group of participants that share experiences with the research objectives, thus a focus group provides activities and/or questions that provoke discussion, the discussion is moderated by the researcher to ensure that the topics do not move outside of the research parameters (Krueger, 1994). Krueger (1995) states that many group experiences are being mislabelled as a focus group within epistemological processes, which typically leads to poor procedures and unreliable data.

Krueger (2002) recommends the following focus group characteristics:

- **Participants:** carefully recruited, 5 to 10 participants, similar types of people, repeated groups
- **Environment:** comfortable, circle seating, recorded

- **Moderator:** skilful in group discussions, uses pre-determined questions, establishes permissive environment
- **Analysis and Reporting:** systematic analysis, verifiable procedures, appropriate reporting

Due to the Covid 19 pandemic, the focus groups were required to take place online, therefore, Krueger (2002) focus group characteristics were adapted to accommodate an online environment. Most of the characteristics were adhered to, with exception to the seating arrangement, also there was no guarantee that the participants were in a comfortable environment in terms of the physical surroundings. To provide a permissive virtual space, focus group schedules were developed to support the collection of rich qualitative data following an adapted version of Breen (2006) recommended structure of a focus group schedule, which includes:

- Welcome
- Overview of the topic
- Ground rules of the focus group, and assurance of confidentiality
- The questions (starting with general experiences, and progressing to specific areas of interest)

The schedules (appendix two) were designed to overcome ethical issues, provide consistency across the various focus groups, and to structure activities and questions that maximised the opportunities to capture qualitative data aligned to the research objectives.

Prior the focus group discussions, the participants were sent a reminder of the ground rules, and some pre-focus group activities from which to enable the focus group discussion to be developed. The focus group activities were developed using an online platform call Padlet which is widely used to host messages and activities which are shared through a private weblink which does not require any kind of user account or login. This platform did not record any sensitive data, and all responses and participants remained anonymous (appendix three).

#### **4.7 Qualitative Questionnaires**

Questionnaires are an information gathering method, quite often used in mixed-method research that draws on quantitative and qualitative research approaches and remain one of the most widely used techniques for data collection (Blaxter

et al., 2006). Through exploration of the use of questionnaires, in particular the use of qualitative questionnaires, this provided some useful insights and justification why this approach should not have been omitted from this study. The use of a qualitative questionnaire supports the capturing of data about the participants, their behaviour, experiences and social interactions, attitudes, and opinions (McLafferty, 2010; Parfitt, 2005). Rivano-Eckerdal and Hagström (2017) states that qualitative questionnaires generate rich material that captures memories, opinions, and experiences, all of which are useful for researchers from many disciplines and merits more attention from scholars. Rivano-Eckerdal and Hagström (2017) further suggest that qualitative questionnaires have much in common with diary entries, however they state that as opposed to diary entries, qualitative questionnaires are designed and used to collect data for the specific situation, and to a higher degree using open-ended questions. There have been scholars that have raised concerns with the use of this type of data collection method to capture qualitative responses, regarding the strong control the researcher has in determining the questions, and the instructions in which participants complete the questionnaire (Richette, 2003; Rivano-Eckerdal and Hagström, 2017). Another critique was stated by Richette (2003) that the use of questionnaires in qualitative research could be skewed by what the participants perceive the researchers want to know, as opposed to an openness that elicits the truth behind the participants' lived experiences.

The use of a questionnaire within this study is part of a triangulation of methods, so the risk stated by Richette (2003) is reduced. To further reduce the risk of over-influence, or poor data collection, the development of this type of questionnaire will require to be well designed for rich qualitative data returns (Babbie, 2013; DeVaus, 2014). Madge (2007) states that questions need to consider the context, relevance, and expectations of the participant group. DeVaus (2014) suggests considering four distinct types of questions when developing a questionnaire, namely, 'attributes'; establishing the respondents' characteristics, 'behaviours'; finding out what the participants do within the context of the research objectives, 'attitudes'; questions that the participants think are desirable or undesirable, and 'beliefs'; questions to elicit responses about what the participants believe to be true or false. Using the scaffold provided by Madge (2007) and DeVaus (2014), the questions were devised to be open-ended, allowing the participants to freely compose their responses which they feel were appropriate (Sommer and Sommer, 2002; Patton, 2002). The qualitative questionnaire was developed and distributed through Qualtrics which

is a widely trusted online data collection tool used across the world by organisations, schools, and scholars. The use of this platform enables questionnaires to be developed using a suite of sophisticated tools to enhance the design, distribution, and analysis of the data. Qualtrics anonymity features enables the participants to self-complete the questionnaire without the concern that their identity will be traced, thus providing greater levels of privacy (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

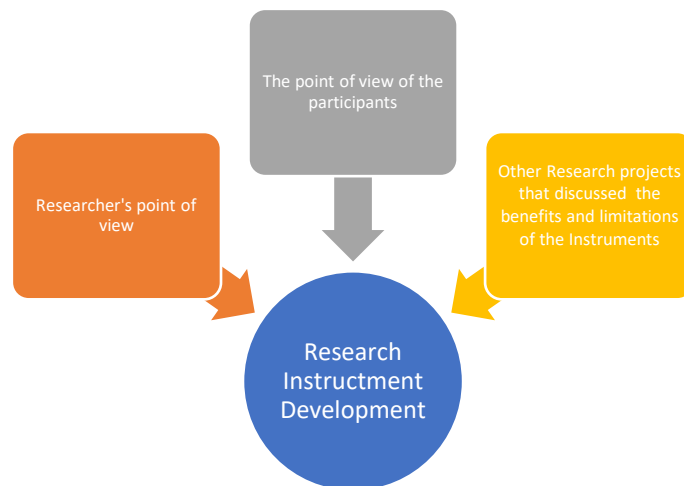
#### **4.8 Pilot Study**

In accordance with the philosophical approach in figure 6, the next stage required the research materials to be tested through a pilot study using the experiences of those who have been apprentices. Porta (2008) defines a pilot study as a small-scale test of the methods and procedures to test the suitability in preparation for a larger scale project. The main purpose of a pilot study is to prevent a study from being conducted without adequate knowledge of the suitability of the methods proposed (Polit and Beck, 2017).

The pilot study was conducted with several participants that were existing members of staff that completed an apprenticeship programme. This approach enabled the research methods to be evaluated by the participants to ensure that the design, methods, procedures, and distribution of the data collection tools were suitable to meet the research objectives and capture rich data from the participants within the main study (Polit and Beck, 2017). The aim of this phenomenological pilot study was to explore the suitability of the research materials that were designed in preparation for the main research project. The proposed qualitative research materials included two 1-hour semi-structured interviews, two 1.5-hour focus groups at key stages of an apprenticeship journey, and a reflective diary that will be maintained by each apprentice throughout the duration of their apprenticeship. In addition to the feedback received from the participants, the researcher engaged with a selection of similar studies, and explored relevant literature to inform the recommendations for developments with the proposed research materials (chapters two and three). The researcher adapted Brookfield's (1995) critical lenses model of



reflection, figure 7, to provide a scaffold of reflection for the pilot study:



**FIGURE 7:** ADAPTED VERSION OF BROOKFIELD'S (1995) CRITICAL LENSES MODEL OF REFLECTION

#### 4.9 Pilot Data Collection

Following the selection of the participants, using a purposive sampling approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with  $n=5$  participants. The participants were either currently an apprentice or completed an apprenticeship within the last twelve months. The researcher chose a semi-structured method to capture the feedback by drawing the participants fully into the topics, and to elicit responses that were grounded in the participants' experience (Galletta and Cross, 2013) of being an apprentice. The researcher planned questions (appendix four) to be asked during the interviews that were open-ended and non-directive to provide the participants with the opportunity to share their experience (Willig, 2001) as an apprentice to make judgements about the research materials. The participants consisted of 2 females, and 3 males, the age ranges were between 25-45. One participant had completed a level 2 and level 3 apprenticeship, another one was currently studying a level 5 apprenticeship, and the other participants had either completed or were studying towards a level 7 apprenticeship. All participants were already employed before enrolling to an apprenticeship.

The participants' apprenticeships and their respective employment were from a range of educational settings including, a private training provider, further education college, and a university. Each participant was employed within different roles in an educational establishment, namely, Administrator, Assessor, Lecturer, Senior Management, and Business Engagement. The participants were provided with the designs of the three research materials (appendix five), and using their experience as an apprentice, they reviewed the effectiveness of each data

collection method over a 6-week period. After which each participant provided their feedback at a semi-structured interview which was transcribed. The findings from the transcriptions informed further amendments to the instrument design, the sample size required for the main study, and the implementation of the research methods. This analytical focus was supported by the interpretative engagement permitted through the interpretative phenomenological analysis process, which enabled the researcher to frame the analysis through the lens of the participants' experiences of being an apprentice. As a result, the findings do not claim to be definitive reading of the participants' accounts, but the result of a co-construction, or 'double hermeneutic' (Smith and Osborn, 2003) between the participant and the researcher's engagement with the data. The first stage of the double hermeneutic is the participant's interpretation of their own experience as an apprentice to evaluate the effectiveness of the research materials. The second stage is the researcher's interpretation of the participant's account, in the knowledge that the researcher's previous engagement with apprenticeships could impact on the interpretation of the data (Smith et al., 2009).

#### **4.10 Pilot Analysis**

For this pilot study, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was chosen to explore the responses of each participant from their experience of being an apprentice. Smith et al. (2009, pg. 1) defined Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as:

*"a qualitative research approach committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences."*

The participants were asked to use their life experiences as an apprentice to provide feedback on the suitability of the research materials. Willig (2001) suggests that the interpretative phenomenological analysis method uses the experience of a participant from their own perspective, however the exploration must take account of the researcher's own views as well as the interaction between the researcher and participant. The researcher is experienced in apprenticeships, therefore cannot completely escape the contextual basis of their own experience (Larkin, Watts, and Clifton, 2006). As a result, the analysis produced by the researcher is their interpretation of the participants' experience (Willig, 2001) that is used to judge the effectiveness of the research materials.

Willig (2001, pg. 58) suggests that interpretative phenomenological analysis is usually based on:

*"Purposive sampling, whereby participants are selected according to criteria of relevance to the research question."*

Willig (2001) described this type of participant as homogeneous, which Willig (2001) defines as a group of participants that have a shared experience of a particular event or situation. Guided by the interpretative phenomenological analysis principles, the transcripts were analysed. Each transcript was examined, and then re-examined before the researcher identified the themes. The themes were organised, and then further inspected in more depth. The relationships of the themes were studied, including any inter-relationships. Finally, themes were integrated across the transcripts for the purpose of thematic analysis, or in other words *"to capture the essence,"* (Willig 2001, pg.61) of the participants' feedback. The researcher was interested in the feedback provided by the participants from their lived experiences as an apprentice, this constituted the analytical focus of this pilot study.

#### **4.11 Pilot Study**

Using an adapted version of the interpretative phenomenological analysis framework suggested by Willig (2009), the researcher followed a four-stage process, the findings can be found in appendix six. Most participants agreed that semi-structured interviews and focus groups are suitable methods for the main study. Gray (2014) suggests that semi-structured interviews enable a researcher to investigate and develop themes that emerge. This co-constructed approach to data gathering (Fontana and Frey, 2000) is particularly beneficial for the purpose of qualitative research (Robson, 2002). Semi-structured interviews were used in a related study by Mulkeen et al. (2019) to explore the challenges and opportunities of designing and delivering Degree and Higher-Level Apprenticeships. The results of the study showed the need for more flexibility in the curriculum design, and the importance of raising the parity of esteem of apprenticeships with academic pathways. The feedback from the participants demonstrates that most agreed with the use of focus groups within the main study. Cry (2017) supports the use of focus groups to generate qualitative data. Cry (2017, pg.1038) states that a focus group is a:

*"Data-collection method that brings together a small group of individuals (i.e., six to eight people) to discuss a series of open-ended questions."*

Some of participants (60%) suggested that the focus groups should include some activities, instead of just focusing on questioning. Ryan and Lőrinc (2018) used a series of focus groups to explore the perceptions, prejudices, and possibilities of apprenticeships, from conducting several different focus groups

with young people who were studying an apprenticeship. In this study, the data was generated through using a mixture of prompts and activities, this provoked conversations and interactions between the participants (Cry, 2017), the study produced a highly regarded set of outputs. Most of the participants did not think the diary instrument was a suitable method for the main study. These participants did agree that the fixed contingent part of the method is suitable. The participants concerns were directed at the event contingent diary entry, they remarked that the apprentices in the main study would not be engaged with this approach.

Willig (2001, pg.27) states that:

*"Diaries are not widely used as a method of data collection in psychological research,"*

whilst the main study is multidisciplinary, this should be recognised as a risk to this study. The diary method has proven to provide some in depth analysis within a variety of studies, namely, Reizer et al. (2019) study into employee motivation, emotions, and performance. This study used a diary method to capture the experiences and emotions of employees to explore the impact of their respective roles on their individual motivation and performance. Some participants highlighted that the apprentices are under pressure to meet the commitments of their apprenticeship, as well as fulfilling their occupational responsibilities, and managing any commitments in their personal lives too. Willig (2001) points out that a diary method requires participants to make a commitment to maintain a record over an extended period. Robson (2002) supports this by stating that a diary places a great deal of responsibility on the respondent. Willig (2001) goes on to suggest that maintaining a diary will inevitably influence the participants' daily routines and, also on their experiences.

The purpose of three research materials is to collectively provide converging lines of enquiry that will yield more convincing and accurate findings (Yin 2003), the diary method is one of the three methods that are proposed for the main study. An alternative option could be explored that also considers the remarks from participant P1 regarding keeping the design simple for ease of use. Several participants suggested the use of a questionnaire instead of the diary method. With the exclusion of the event contingent, the diary method is a qualitative questionnaire. McIntosh (2017) used a questionnaire in a study that explored what influenced a group of apprentices to undertake an apprenticeship. One of the results of the study, showed that apprentices were not influenced or indeed

encouraged by their schools to undertake an apprenticeship, which could have impacted on their initial perceptions of apprenticeships.

The additional questions suggested by participant P2 and P4 include a question to confirm whether the participant was an existing member of staff before enrolling onto an apprenticeship, and the second question, focused on the funding stream that was used to pay for the apprenticeship training. These questions will support the study to validate the samples' alignment to the research objectives and will also provide another insight into whether funding impacted on the perception of the participants. To provide opportunities to validate the responses (Punch, 2009) and crosscheck any inaccuracies, the option of using a questionnaire as part of a triangulation of the data collection should be explored. Robson (2002) suggests that there is nothing to stop a researcher asking a wide range of open-ended questions to gain qualitative data within a questionnaire but warns that this is likely to return a data set that ranges in detail and will require more of the researcher's time to analyse. However, through using open-ended questions in the questionnaire, there is more opportunity for the respondents to compose their responses and to expand where they consider necessary (Sommer and Sommer, 2002).

The terminology within the methods needs further consideration, especially the terms 'community of practice,' 'social learning' and 'behaviour.' All participants remarked regarding the need to soften the language. Robson (2002) suggests that questions should be put in a straightforward, clear, and non-threatening way, otherwise the participants may become confused and defensive. Robson (2002) recommends that questions containing words that are likely to be unfamiliar to the target audience should be avoided. Most participants agreed with the frequency of the semi-structured method, and two participants commented that a mapping exercise would be worthwhile to ensure that the research objectives are being covered throughout the methods and associated questions. These participants reinforced this message again when they provided comments that were discussed within the trending recommendations cluster, see appendix six, chart 4. The researcher acknowledges that this is good practice and should be conducted once all amendments have been made to the research materials. Most of participants (80%) suggested a smaller sample size for the study to enable the research to focus deeply on the lived experience of several apprentices. Lichtman (2010) suggests that qualitative research studies often use a small sample, but with the aim of covering the material and themes in

depth. Cry (2017) recommends a smaller group for in-depth analysis, and to encourage participation within focus groups.

Mason (2010, pg. 2) states that

*"Qualitative samples must be large enough to assure that most or all of the perceptions that might be important are uncovered, but at the same time if the sample is too large data becomes repetitive and, eventually, superfluous."*

Ritchie et al. (2003) states that there is a point of diminishing return to a qualitative sample; more data does not necessarily lead to more knowledge. Creswell (1998) suggests for a phenomenology study that the sample should consist of 3 to 15 participants. Morse (1994) provides the suggestion that at least 6 participants are required to generate the knowledge to satisfy a qualitative research enquiry. Similarly, Kuzel (1992) recommends a sample of 6 to 8 participants for a homogeneous sample.

Considering the participants feedback within the pilot study, and from drawing upon a variety of literature, a saturation approach to the sample size should be considered. Glaser and Strauss (1967) defined saturation as judging when to stop sampling the distinct groups because no additional knowledge can be found. Morse (1994, p.147) states that:

*"Saturation is the key to excellent qualitative work."*

Robson (2002) suggests that the researcher has reached saturation when no additional knowledge can be achieved from increasing the sample size.

#### **4.12 Recommendations from Pilot Study**

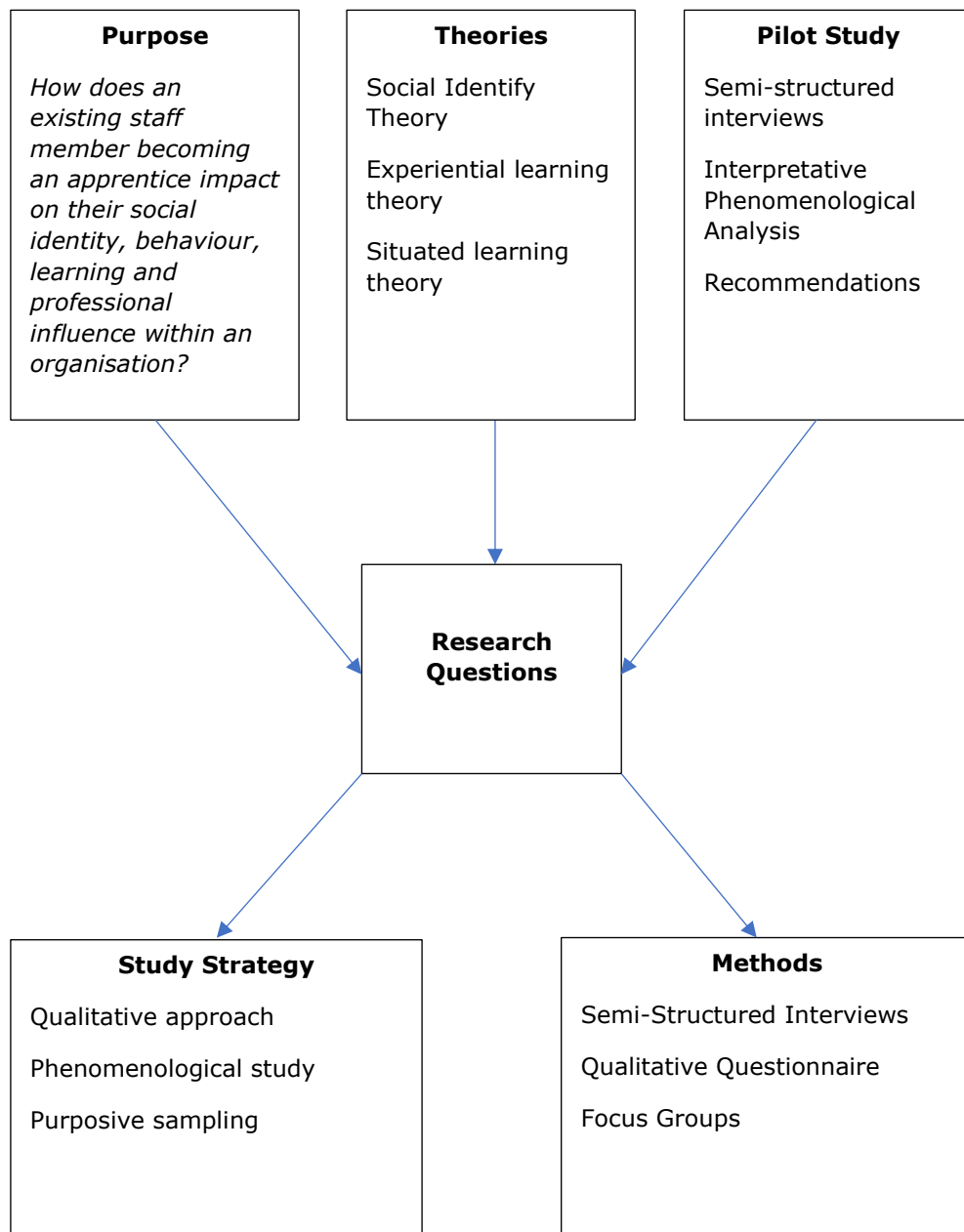
Using the adapted Brookfield (1995) reflection model in figure 7, feedback from participants and an exploration of literature was used to formulate the recommendations. The findings of the pilot study were analysed using an adapted IPA framework as suggested by Willig (2009). Collectively, the pilot study concludes with the following recommendations to inform the development of the research materials:

1. The researcher to conduct the semi-structured interviews in a manner that elicits an open-endedness and conversation, and will enable the phenomenon to be expressed by the participants (Willig, 2009; Galletta and Cross, 2013)
2. Terminology, words that are likely to be unfamiliar to the target audience should be avoided, Robson (2002)

3. Focus groups to include some interactive activities to provoke further conversations and interactions between the participants (Cry, 2017)
4. A qualitative questionnaire should be used in place of the diary method, this will reduce the level of additional responsibility placed on the participants to maintain a diary (Robson, 2002)
5. A selection of methods, including semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires should be used to provide opportunities to validate the responses and crosscheck any inaccuracies (Punch 2009)
6. A further mapping exercise (3.4.7 - Research Design) is required to ensure that the research materials align to the research objectives and provide converging lines of enquiry (Yin, 2003) to capture the lived experiences of the participants
7. Inclusion of two additional questions one to confirm that the participants were already a pre-existing employee, and the other to discuss how the participants apprenticeship is funded
8. The sample size should initially consist of 6 participants, Morse (1994), from a range of apprenticeship providers, and levels. Further participants will be added if saturation is not reached, Robson (2002).

#### **4.13 Research Design – Mapping**

When referring to flexibility in research design, Robson (2002) used the terminology 'fixed' and 'flexible', Robson (2011) suggested that flexible designs rather than fixed, are more suitable for qualitative research. Following a flexible research design process enables the methods of inquiry to evolve incrementally in response to the data obtained (Robson, 2002). Ensuing the completion of the pilot study, the researcher thought it prudent to follow a research design framework to validate the suitability of the study strategies and research materials. Using an adapted version of Robson's (2002) framework for a research design, figure 8 used the purpose of the study, associated theories, and the pilot study to support the design of the research questions. Confirmation of the research questions enabled the researcher to identify the study strategies and associated methods.



**FIGURE 8:** AN ADAPTED VERSION OF ROBSON (2002) FRAMEWORK FOR A RESEARCH DESIGN

Using figure 8 as a framework, table 5, identifies the: research methods, fixed points of sampling, and examples of questions/activities. Table 5 collectively provides the researcher with a flexible and reflective research design approach that enables the research questions/activities to evolve over time, as the data is collected (Robson, 2002).



Table 5 below demonstrates how the data collection from sampling throughout each stage of the project is used to inform the instrument questions/activities at a later stage of the study (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Robson, 2002; Robson, 2011). This flexible design will enable the study to be reflective, agile, and will provide further opportunities for the researcher to validate the participants' responses (Punch, 2009).

**TABLE 5: MAPPING RESEARCH QUESTIONS TO METHOD, AND SAMPLING TIMELINE**

Research Questions	Methods	Apprenticeship Journey	Example Questions/Activities
How do employees' preconceptions of an apprenticeship impact on their behaviour and social identity when they become an apprentice within their organisation?	Questionnaire 1	Start	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Please confirm whether you were already employed into your role before starting an apprenticeship?</li> <li>• Please can you explain what is your general perception of apprenticeships?</li> <li>• can you explain how your perception of apprenticeships could impact on your norms, values, and beliefs within your organisation?</li> <li>• Please explain how your perception of apprenticeships could influence the way you see yourself in your professional spaces at work.</li> <li>• Please describe how you believe you are performing within your job role.</li> <li>• Describe how you reached this conclusion?</li> </ul>
	Semi-Structured Interview 1	After completion of 'Start' Questionnaire (validation and to build on collective responses)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Please can you start by telling me a little bit about yourself?</li> <li>• Could you describe what your perception of apprenticeships are, please?</li> <li>• What do you feel has contributed to that perception?</li> <li>• Apprenticeships are funded by the employer, or through the ESFA (Education, Skills Funding Agency), can you explain whether this has influenced your perception of apprenticeships?</li> <li>• Can you describe how the apprenticeship could support your personal development and career prospects?</li> <li>• Please could you describe to me the way you see yourself in your professional spaces at work?</li> <li>• Does that differ to how you would describe yourself in your personal life?</li> <li>• Please can you describe yourself at work, think about your norms, values, and belief?</li> <li>• Describe how you think learning on the job will support you to make progress within your job role and on your apprenticeship?</li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Could you now explain how you feel that becoming an apprentice will impact you and your job role?</li> <li>• Could you describe any social groups that you feel you are currently engaged with?</li> <li>• Describe any new social groups that you hope to be a part of, because of being an apprentice?</li> <li>• One quality of these groups is the way in which the group can learn from each other. How do you feel that being part of this kind of social group might influence your learning?</li> <li>• Please could you describe how you currently learn on the job?</li> <li>• Could you explain how you use reflection when developing new knowledge/skill?</li> <li>• Explain how you think learning on the job will support you to make progress within your job role and on your apprenticeship?</li> <li>• What methods of learning work best for you?</li> <li>• How do you think you will learn during the apprenticeship?</li> <li>• Please describe how you believe you are performing within your job role.</li> <li>• Explain how you reached this conclusion?</li> <li>• Other comments</li> </ul>
How do employees' perceptions of their social identity change during and after the apprenticeship?	Questionnaire 2	On-programme (3-months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Please describe whether your perception of apprenticeship has changed?</li> <li>• Could you explain how your current perception of apprenticeships impacts on your work</li> <li>• Please explain how your current perception of apprenticeships influenced the way you view yourself at work.</li> <li>• Please describe how you believe you are performing within your job role.</li> <li>• Describe how you reached this conclusion?</li> </ul>
	Focus Group 1	After completion of 'On-programme' questionnaire (Validation and to build on responses)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activity 1: Prompt Cards, using paraphrased statements of perceptions taken from Questionnaire 'On-programme'</li> <li>• How do you think being an apprentice will impact on how others view you?</li> <li>• Do you think being an apprentice will change the way you are during work?</li> <li>• Do you think that being an apprentice will change the way you are treated at work?</li> </ul>
	Questionnaire 3	End of Study, 12-months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having completed several months of your apprenticeship, describe your perception of an</li> </ul>

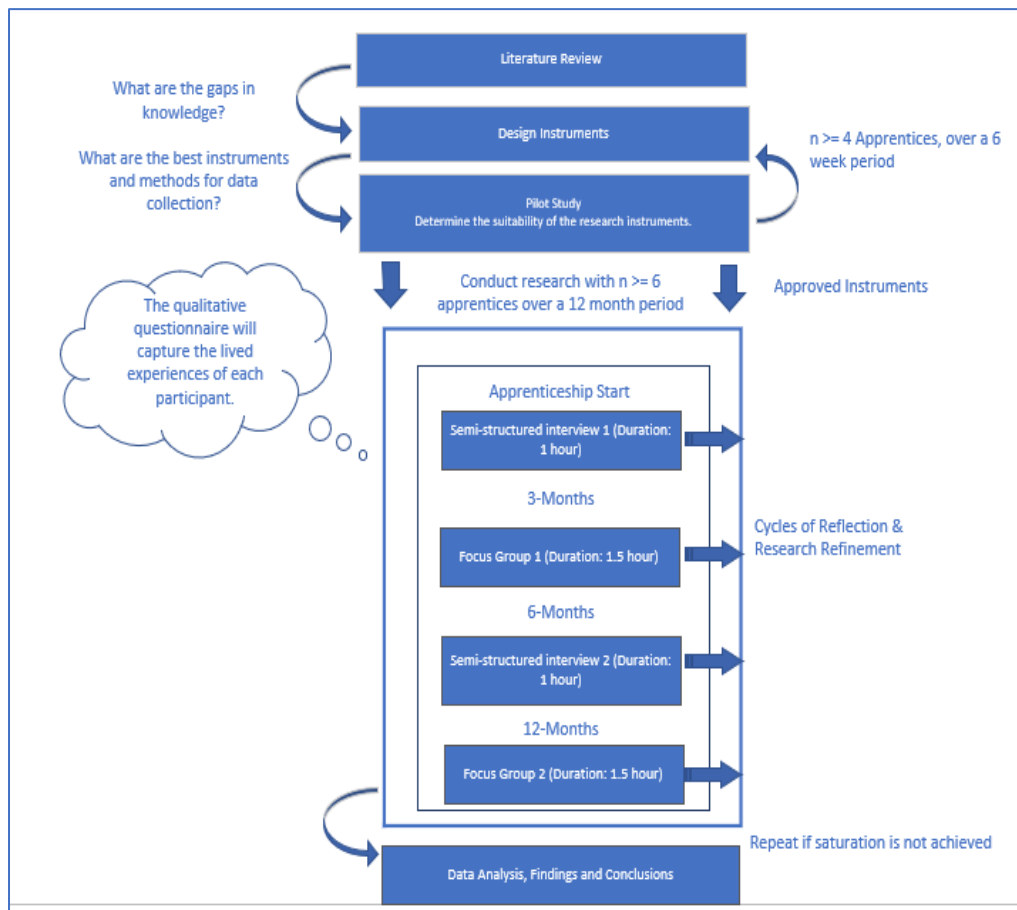
		<p>apprenticeship compared to you when you first started the apprenticeship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On reflection, did being an apprentice impact your work?</li> <li>• On reflection, how did being an apprentice influence the way you see yourself at work?</li> <li>• On-reflection, please describe how you believe you performed within your job role, during your apprenticeship?</li> <li>• Describe how you reached this conclusion?</li> <li>• Describe how your employer mentor supported you in your role?</li> <li>• How could the support provided be improved from your employer mentor?</li> <li>• Describe how your assessor from the training provider supported you?</li> <li>• How could the support provided be improved from your assessor?</li> </ul>
Semi-Structured Interview 2	After completion of 'End of Study' Questionnaire (validation and to build on responses)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overall, can you describe how being an apprentice made you feel?</li> <li>• Could you explain how this impacted your learning on the job?</li> <li>• Could you explain how this view impacted your learning off the job?</li> <li>• Please explain how your perception of apprenticeships could influence the way you see yourself in your professional spaces at work.</li> <li>• Describe how your employer mentor supported you in your role?</li> <li>• How could the support provided be improved from your employer mentor?</li> <li>• Describe how your assessor from the training provider supported you?</li> <li>• How could the support provided be improved from your assessor?</li> <li>• Can you explain how your employer recognises that you are an apprentice?</li> </ul>
Focus Group 2	After completion of Semi-Structured Interview 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open discussion by asking has your view of an apprenticeship changed because of completing 12 months of one?</li> <li>• Do you think the general views of your colleagues have changed since you have completed an apprenticeship?</li> <li>• What did you achieve from doing an apprenticeship?</li> <li>• Did being an apprentice impact on how others viewed you?</li> <li>• Did being an apprentice change the way you were during work?</li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did you get treated differently because of being an apprentice?</li> <li>• Did the apprenticeship improve your career prospects?</li> </ul>
How does becoming an apprentice impact on pre-existing communities of practice or are new communities of practice formed?	Focus Group 1	After completion of 'On-programme' questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activity 2: Which groups of people support you at work, and which support you with your apprenticeship? Word Cloud e.g., Online Social Group, Professional Membership, Apprenticeship Peers, Work Colleagues, Other.</li> <li>• Please describe which groups you engaged with before starting an apprenticeship</li> <li>• Explain whether you still engage with these groups?</li> <li>• How does being an apprentice impact on your contributions within these groups?</li> <li>• Explain if you are part of any new groups because of being an apprentice</li> <li>• Describe how being part of these social groups supports you in work and on your apprenticeship</li> </ul>
Do the apprentices believe that experiential learning is being used to support them to make progress, if so, how?	Semi-Structured Interview 1	After completion of 'Start' Questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe how you think learning on the job will support you to make progress within your job role and on your apprenticeship?</li> </ul>
	Semi-Structured Interview 2	After completion of 'End of Study' Questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe how learning on the job supported you to make progress within your job role and on your apprenticeship?</li> <li>• Can you explain how your employer provides you with time, and engages in conversations with you to reflect and observe how your apprenticeship is supporting your work</li> <li>• Can you explain how your tutor/assessor from the training provider checks on your progress and supports you on a regular basis?</li> <li>• Describe how you use these ideas to make decisions and problem solve within your job role</li> <li>• Describe how you reflect on each stage of your development, from learning a new concept through to being confident in applying it with your role</li> <li>• Please describe what improvements your employer and training provider could make to improve apprenticeship training?</li> </ul>
Does the apprentices' social identity, situated and		After completion of Semi-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activity 3: Using Kolb (1984) Four Stage Cycle as a framework, firstly as an</li> </ul>

experiential learning interlink, if so, how?	Focus Group 2	Structured Interview 2	apprentice, and then as an employee: Discuss how aspects of learning on the job impacted on your identity at work, and in training, progress, your social groups
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#### 4.14 Philosophical Approach – Revised

From completing the pilot study, it provided this study with a co-constructed methodological approach (Fontana and Frey, 2000; Smith and Osborn, 2003) which resulted in a revised philosophical approach (Figure 9) from the initial framework design in figure 6.



**FIGURE 9: PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH – REVISED**

From completion of the initial phases (literature review, design research materials, and pilot study), the full study commenced using the approach as outlined in the research mapping table (table 5). The pilot study that was conducted demonstrated that the main study required qualitative methods,

namely semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and a qualitative questionnaire.

Bryman (2008) defines qualitative research as a strategy that emphasises words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data. This study examined the lived experience as it was felt or undergone by the participants (Kincheloe, 1991) using the participants' words and 'thick' descriptions (Bazeley, 2013).

The study was conducted in phases, as outlined in figure 9, and required cycles of reflection (Brookfield, 1995) to capture any changes in attitudes, behaviours, and the lived experiences of the participants. The first stage included a questionnaire at the beginning of the epistemological process to capture the initial perceptions, and experiences of the participants (Parfitt, 2005). Following this, a semi-structured interview was conducted to test and build upon the responses of the questionnaire (Robson, 2002). After approximately three months into the participants' apprenticeship journey a second questionnaire was conducted to capture their current experiences, which also made comparisons to their initial thoughts and feelings (McLafferty, 2010) regarding their apprenticeship programme, and any impact on their role as an existing employee. Approximately six months into the research, the participants attended a focus group to explore social learning and communities of practice, and to encourage group discussion to go beyond the facts that were previously presented by the participants (Bazeley, 2013), regarding the impact of being an apprentice as an existing staff member. The final stage of the research involved a second semi-structured interview at month nine of the epistemological cycle, followed by a final focus group and a questionnaire at the end of the twelve-month cycle. This final stage of the research holistically reviewed the participants' apprenticeship journey, and the impact on them as an existing employee, in particular their lived experiences, thoughts, and feelings (Bryman, 2008).

#### **4.15 Sample and Data Validity**

Akin with the pilot study, purposive sampling was used to select the participants to ensure that the sample included individuals that occupy a unique position relative to the research endeavour (Schutt, 2006), which for this empirical inquiry required participants who were existing employees that later became an apprentice within their occupation. Rubin and Rubin (1995) provided the following guidelines for selecting participants using a purposive approach, these

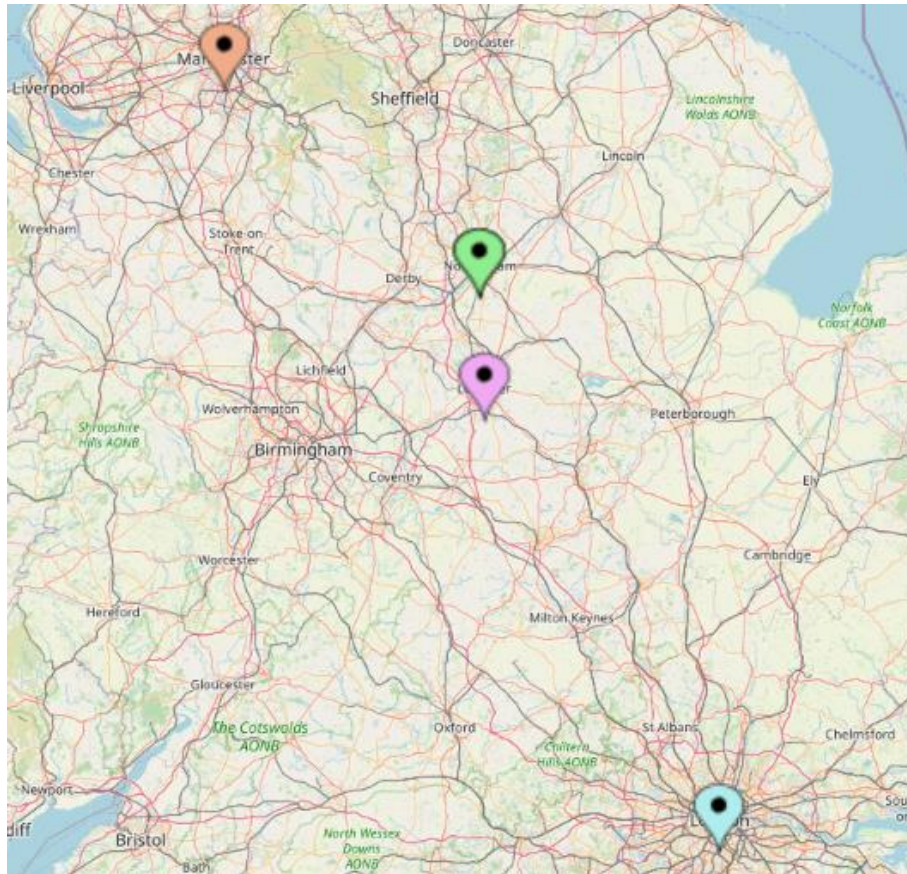
included focusing on individuals who are knowledgeable about the situation or experience being examined, willing to discuss their experience, and can discuss a range of different points relevant to the research. Furthermore, Glaser and Strauss (1967) highlight the importance of selecting participants who share both similarities and differences to provide more rich data. Following the approaches suggested by Schutt (2006), Rubin and Rubin (1995), Glaser and Strauss (1967) n=9 participants were purposively selected from a range of sectors including, Health, Marketing and Sales, Education, Business Development, Construction, and a Local Authority. Table 6 provides a tally of participants against each characteristic relevant to this study:

**TABLE 6: SAMPLE: CHARACTERISTICS**

Education Provider Type	Apprenticeship Level	Gender	Age
Further Education College x 1	Level 3 x 1	Female x 5	25-35 x 2
	Level 4 x 1	Male x 4	36-46 x 4
Independent Training Provider x 3	Level 5 x 2		46+ x 3
	Level 6 x 2		
Higher Education Institute x 5	Level 7 x 3		

#### 4.16 Geographical Locations

Figure 10 illustrates the approximate geographical spread of the participants across England, 6 participants were based in Nottinghamshire, 1 in Leicestershire, 1 in Manchester and 1 in London; the purpose was to validate responses from a wider proximity. The locations are large enough to avoid inadvertently risking the anonymity of the participants.



**FIGURE 10: SAMPLE** – GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATIONS

The empirical inquiry followed the qualitative philosophical approach shown in figure 9, this was to generate a 'reliable' understanding of the phenomenon that would be otherwise be enigmatic or confusing (Eisner, 1991). When considering the reliability of the findings within a qualitative study, Stenbacka (2001) suggests that it is misleading in a qualitative study because using reliability as a criterion within such a study suggests that the qualitative approach used was limited. Patton (2002) proposes the opposite by suggesting that any qualitative researcher should be concerned about validity and reliability when conducting and analysing the results of a qualitative study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) use the term dependability when referring to the notion of reliability within qualitative research and discusses the importance of an internal audit to increase the dependability of the findings. They further suggest that there can be:

*"No validity without reliability, and therefore a demonstration of the former is sufficient to establish the latter,"* (pg. 316).

Patton (2002) supports the concept that reliability is a consequence of validity in a qualitative study. Acknowledging Stenbacka (2001) concern that reliability measurements of quality have no relevance within a qualitative study, this study focused on the validity of the research through internal audits which included a pilot study in the first instance to test the suitability of the research materials,



and then by applying the process of triangulation to demonstrate that the findings were dependable (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), and reliable through the demonstration of the validity that was applied (Patton, 2002). Triangulation loosely refers to the use of multiple methodological resources to corroborate the findings (Denzin, 2009; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

For this study, the use of multiple research materials was used to triangulate the process of qualitative data collection through semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and focus groups. These methods were conducted using a group of participants from different sectors, courses, educational providers and who held various levels of authority within their occupation. This provided a richness to the data, as well as ensuring that the data was from a variety of participants that were in a position relative to the research endeavour (Schutt, 2006), and who shared both similarities and differences within their lived experiences as apprentices (Strauss, 1967). The process of triangulation increased the validity by cross-checking the consistency of knowledge derived from the use of each qualitative methods, and from multiple sources to examine the same phenomenon (Yin, 2010).

#### **4.17 Data Analysis**

Interpretative phenomenological analysis was used to examine the data generated from the semi-structured interviews. Smith et al. (2009) describe interpretative phenomenological analysis as:

*"An approach to qualitative, experiential and psychological research which has been informed by concepts and debates from three key areas of philosophy of knowledge: phenomenology, hermeneutics and ideography,"* (pg. 11).

These three key concepts aligned well to the research paradigm as this study is concerned with exploring human lived experiences and the perceptions of those experiences from the participants. Moreover, this studied followed the four quality indicators as suggested by Nizza et al. (2021), these include:

#### ***Constructing a compelling unfolding narrative***

The findings should provide a sense of progression over a narrative and convey a story that is coherent to the analysis and one that operates within, and across themes (Nizza et al., 2021).

### ***Developing a rigorous experiential and/or existential account***

Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) suggest that good interpretative phenomenological analysis is always about the events that are of importance to people, and indeed the situations in which promoted them to reflect on what has happened to make sense of the meaning. Smith (2019) builds on this by suggesting that what turns an event into an experience is the level of significance conferred on it by a person through attempting to make sense of it, thus resulting in varying levels of experiential or existential meaning.

### ***Close analytic reading of participant's words***

Nizza et al. (2021) states that there needs to be a commitment from a researcher to interpretation and idiographic depth through analytic reading of the participant quotes. This is to ensure that the fuller meaning of the data within the quote and wider context is examined, and the way the participant is making sense of the experience is revealed.

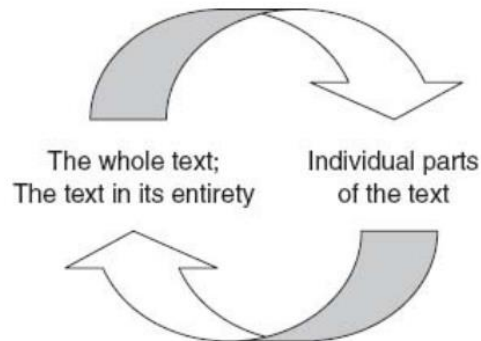
### ***Attending to convergence and divergence***

Convergence and divergence are used to illustrate the similarities and differences between participants. Nizza et al. (2021) state that convergence and divergence show both the pattern of connection, as well as to highlight experiences that are unique to a participant. To align to the Nizza et al. (2021) four quality indicators, the homogeneous (Willig, 2001) participants within the main study were purposively sampled for their unique characteristics aligned to the research objectives, moreover, for their interpretation of their lived experiences as existing employees that later became an apprentice. Interpretative phenomenological analysis recognises the role of both the participants and the researcher in making sense of the lived experiences from the participants, Smith (2004) refers to this as a double hermeneutics:

*"a participant is trying to make sense of their personal and social world, and the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their personal and social world," (pg.40).*

Finlay (2008) states that the challenge to double hermeneutics is to ensure that the research is critically and reflexively evaluated how the researcher's pre-understandings have influenced the research. To reduce the impact of the researcher's pre-understandings over influencing the study, Smith et al. (2009) suggests that a considerable number of verbatim extracts from the participants' material should be used to support the argument being made; this suggestion was

used within the research findings. Furthermore, interpretative phenomenological analysis requires the researcher to engage with the hermeneutic circle (figure 11).



**FIGURE 11:** THE HERMENEUTIC CIRCLE AS A METHOD OF INTERPRETATION (SCHWANDT, 2007)

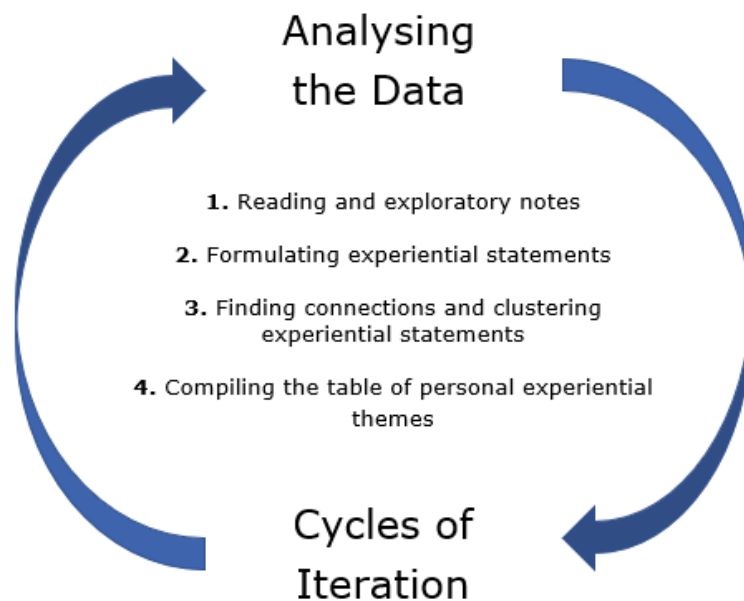
Schwandt (2007) states that the hermeneutic circle is

*"a methodological process or condition of understanding, namely, that coming to understand the meaning of the whole of a text and coming to understand its parts were always interdependent activities. Construing the meaning of the whole meant making sense of the parts and grasping the meaning of the parts depended on having some sense of the whole,"* (pg. 2).

Smith et al. (2009) state that the hermeneutic circle can be thought of as an iterative process, which requires the researcher to move between the smaller and larger units of meaning, or between the parts of the whole, including the use of non-verbal cues, of the investigated phenomena. Smith et al. (2009) further states that the researcher should be mindful of their beliefs and pre-understandings to enrich their interpretations rather than becoming an obstacle to making sense of the participants' experiences. Goldstein (2017) refers to this mindful process as 'reflexivity', which is defined as the process of 'being aware' and recognising how the researcher's own lived experiences and pre-understandings influences the research process. Heidegger (1962) discussed hermeneutics, he considered this theory of interpretation in the context of going beyond the surface appearance or account to establish a deeper meaning of a participant's interpretation of their lived experience.

This study followed the hermeneutic circle method through recognising from the outset the double hermeneutic relationship between the participants' and the researchers' prior pre-understandings with the research objectives, this was part of the purpose of the use of triangulated methods to ensure the validity of the data. Interpretative phenomenological analysis attempts to reduce the impact of

this relationship through the process of intersubjective reflexivity, which Finlay (2002) refers to as exploring the mutual meanings that emerges with the research relationship, at the same time as focusing on the situated and negotiated nature of the research encounter. For the main study, the iterative interpretative phenomenological analysis process as outlined by Smith and Nizza (2021) was used to examine the data (figure 12). This process has been refined by Smith and Nizza (2021) and is therefore more current than Willig (2009) framework that was previously used in the pilot study.



**FIGURE 12:** ILLUSTRATION OF THE MAIN STAGES OF INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS (SMITH AND NIZZA, 2021)

Smith and Nizza (2021) process as illustrated in figure 12, requires a researcher to first engage through reading a transcription line by line, and adding exploratory notes. Following this, the researcher should formulate experiential statements alongside the exploratory notes. Smith and Nizza (2021) recommend that this process is completed in a tabular form (figure 13).

Experiential Statements	Line No	Original Text	Exploratory Notes

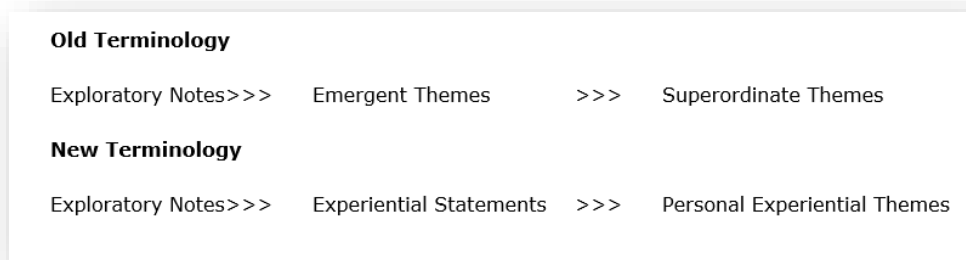
**FIGURE 13:** TABULAR EXAMPLE: EXPLANATORY NOTES AND EXPERIENTIAL STATEMENTS

The final stage of the analysis stage is compiling the table of personal experiential themes, Smith and Nizza (2021) again suggest a tabular format (see figure 14).

Personal Experiential Theme	Page/Line No	Quotes from Original Text

**FIGURE 14:** TABULAR EXAMPLE: PERSONAL EXPERIENTIAL THEMES

Smith and Nizza (2021) state that the stages of interpretative phenomenological analysis should be completed iteratively, the researcher needs to re-engage with the text to ensure validity and completeness. Once the analysis is completed, the researcher will complete a cross-case analysis, and then a final write-up of the findings. During the group analysis phase Smith et al. (2022) suggests that consideration of how many participants a theme is evident is recommended, Smith (2011) and Smith et al. (2022) suggestion of at least two thirds of participants' experience where there is convergence was followed to evident a theme. It is noteworthy to highlight that in comparison to previous versions of interpretative phenomenological analysis, Smith and Nizza (2021) suggest a change in the terminology used (figure 15), whilst not impacting on the original process, the new terminology reflects more precisely what the terms do (Smith and Nizza, 2021). This new terminology was used during the interpretative phenomenological analysis of the main study.



**FIGURE 15:** INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS: NEW TERMINOLOGY  
(SMITH AND NIZZA, 2021)

Conversely, unlike semi-structured interviews, the qualitative questionnaires generated data that was anonymised, and used a set of structured open questions to generate responses. This did not allow a real-time exploration of the individuals' sense of being within their own individual context (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2021), or provided opportunities to expand on the individual responses through further questioning. Furthermore, Tomkins and Eatough (2010) state that interpretative phenomenological analysis for examining focus group data does not have the same theoretical foundation as a hermeneutic method for analysing semi-structured interview data. Tomkins and Eatough (2010) go further by stating that it should not be assumed that interpretative phenomenological analysis can remain unchanged when applied to focus groups. Whilst Tomkins and Eatough (2010) acknowledge that is possible to adjust the interpretative phenomenological analysis method for group data, there remains some profound theoretical and epistemological questions about the idiographic and psychological impact because of the focus on a group-individual dynamic. Instead, the participants' responses to the questionnaires and focus groups were analysed using thematic analysis, as first encountered by the researcher in Braun and Clarke (2006) and then later developed by Braun and Clarke (2013).

The six phases proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) were followed, these included:

- Familiarising oneself with the data – immerse oneself through reading and re-reading the data
- Generating initial codes – generate pithy labels for notable features that are relevant to the research questions
- Searching for themes – find coherent and meaningful patterns in the data

- Reviewing themes – check that the themes work across the coded extracts and the full dataset
- Defining and naming the themes – identify the essence of each theme and construct concise and informative names for each theme
- Producing the report – write up the findings coherently that articulates a persuasive story about the data.

The data was not studied using a linear approach, instead the data was examined using a recursive process (Braun and Clarke, 2006), this approach was useful for summarising the key features of the data, and to elicit the relationships and trends in the qualitative data. Questions and prompts were used to provoke a discussion regarding the group's opinion as this was as important as the individuals' point of view (Coe, 2021).

#### **4.18 Methodology Conclusion**

This chapter described the philosophical assumptions and processes used to justify the choice of methodological approaches used to conduct the research (Saunders and Rojon, 2014). Each of the methods were first justified for use within this study, and then further explored using a pilot study which conducted a small-scale test of the methods and procedures in preparation for the main study (Polit and Beck, 2017). The pilot study identified several areas of improvement which were documented using an adapted version of Robson (2002) framework for a research design (figure 8). Subsequently, the schedules were developed and further reviewed to ensure alignment with the research objectives. Subsequently, the development, examination, verification and refinement of the research methods, procedures, techniques, and tools (Kumar, 2019) was conducted using a body of literature. This provided research materials that were dependable (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), and reliable through the demonstration of validity (Patton, 2002). Ethical considerations were also discussed, and where concerns were identified, mitigations were put in place. Once ethical approval was awarded, the participants were selected using a purposive approach (Rubin and Rubin, 1995), and qualitative research was completed using a triangulation of methods to corroborate the findings (Denzin, 2009; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). The interpretative phenomenological analysis process was further developed compared to the Willig (2009) framework that was used in the pilot study, and consequentially, the data analysis process outlined by Smith and Nizza (2021) was used to examine the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews.

For the qualitative questionnaires and focus groups, thematical analysis was used following the six phases suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), this was useful to identify the themes related to the research questions, and to summarise the key findings, trends, and relationships between the themes.



## **Chapter Five Findings**

For this chapter each phase findings are outlined, and subsequently discussed using supporting literature in chapter six.

### **Phase One: Findings**

Following the completion of the data collection as outlined in Figure 9, which was collected in three phases, these included: Apprenticeship Start (0-3 months), On-Programme (3-6 months), and Final Reflection (6-12 months). These phases and respective findings are discussed below. As stated in the methodology, the semi-structured interviews were analysed using Smith and Nizza's (2021) approach to interpretative phenomenological analysis, and followed the recommendation from Smith (2011, 2022), that two thirds of the convergent themes from participants are used to evidence a theme.

### **Phase One: Apprenticeship Start (0-3 months)**

Phase one included a semi-structured interview and a qualitative questionnaire. The purpose of this phase was to establish why the participants started an apprenticeship, their preconceptions of apprenticeships, and their lived experience between first three months of their apprenticeship journey as an existing member of staff. More significantly, whether there are links between their motive and preconceptions of apprenticeships, and their perceptions of self at work and as an apprentice. Moreover, how this perception of self is constructed within the different contexts of their employment, and within on and off-the-job training.

**Phase One: Semi-structured Interview**

The cross-case analysis grouped personal experiential themes that were explicated from the semi-structured data which includes noteworthy non-verbal cues. The grouped experiential themes, and sub themes are listed in table 7:

**TABLE 7** PHASE ONE: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW, GROUP EXPERIENTIAL THEMES

<b>Group Experiential Theme</b>	<b>Sub-theme</b>
1. Motive for starting an apprenticeship	1a. Gaining more than just career enhancement 1b. Having to do an apprenticeship 1c. Fear of redundancy
2. Prior perceptions of apprenticeships	2a. Being for 'young people' 2b. Vocationally focussed 2c. Aimed at the lower levels
3. Apprenticeship identity	3a. Not being recognised as an apprentice 3b. Reaction to being an apprentice from others 3c. Employed apprentices receive a better level of support
4. Having a sense of belonging	4a. Access to pre-existing communities of practice with an employer 4b. Community of practice with peers
5. Quality of training	5a. Quality of training from training provider 5b. Level of support provided by employer mentor
6. Training plan and reflection	6a. Training plan and reflection

Each group experiential theme, and sub themes are discussed below.

**1. Motive for starting an apprenticeship**

This group experiential theme was concerned with the participants' sense of motivation about starting an apprenticeship as an existing staff member. Through discussing their reasoning, this led the participants to consider who they are within their current occupation. This had implications on the participants' emotions, and inadvertently made the participants consider their career ambition, and for some it created a sense of insecurity and uncertainty, whereas for others, excitement, and optimism.

Due to the extent of mixed emotions, and sense-making of their purpose of starting an apprenticeship, it consequentially, required three sub-themes to

depict the level of divergence, which include: 1a Gaining more than just career enhancement, 1b Having to do an apprenticeship, 1c Fear of redundancy.

### **1a. Gaining more than just career enhancement**

Most participants asked their respective employer whether they could enrol to an apprenticeship programme with a feeling of excitement and optimism. P14 described this feeling of becoming an apprentice as an opportunity to progress within his career.

*"I am 30 years of age, and which is partly [why] I chose to do an apprenticeship. I got to 30 and thought, let us have a review of things and see where I want to go next [and to] open that door and breakthrough that ceiling I am hitting currently".*

P14 uses the term 'breakthrough' which suggests a feeling of being held back or stuck, however, this also suggests a sense of optimism that the apprenticeship is providing him at least an opportunity to acquire the knowledge, skills, and behaviours for him to move towards his career ambition. During the interview, P14 appeared confident in his academic abilities, and has indeed already achieved a level of education that is equivalent to the apprenticeship he is on. He became less confident when expressing his level of management expertise, citing his age, to suggest he saw this as a milestone in which he now needs to progress to the next level of seniority. He was clearly enthusiastic about the apprenticeship, and with the focus primarily being on management, he was clearly hopeful that it will provide him with the 'breakthrough' he has been looking for. Similarly, P6 described a sense of opportunity that was created by starting an apprenticeship:

*"I wanted to be a nurse, that's my goal so got a job in a healthcare setting and after being in employment for a while I asked whether they would put me on an apprenticeship to become a nurse"*

P6 describes her motive for starting an apprenticeship with a clear sense of certainty about what she wants her career to move towards. There appears to be a sense of frustration in some of the language that P6 uses, for example, she said that "I wanted to be a nurse", this suggests that this has been an ambition of hers for some time even before working within healthcare. P6 goes further within the interview to confirm that she was working at a senior level within a different occupational discipline before deciding to move into a very junior position in healthcare. This gives the sense of her following a career pathway that provides her with a feeling of being finally on a career trajectory that she is innately passionate about, which was also clearly apparent from her jubilant body language and her change in voice projection during the interview. This

motivation was despite having to take a significant reduction, albeit in the short-term, in her professional status because of moving into healthcare as an unqualified Healthcare Assistant.

P7 is 30 years of age, and classes herself as a mature student, like P6 she was noticeably clear on the purpose of starting an apprenticeship.

*"I have done a full-time job before, I was a visual merchandiser for XXXX... when the pandemic hit, that's when I knew, I was like I need to change this up a bit and I've been looking at digital marketing for quite a while."*

During the interview P7 was clearly enthusiastic about starting her apprenticeship, she had been trying to secure a marketing position for a while. She had actively completed short courses related to the marketing sector as an existing employee but was finding it difficult to secure a position within marketing. In the interview, she expressed how lucky she is to be on the apprenticeship, because of personal circumstances and the Covid-19 pandemic she felt that it was the perfect time to start learning again. Like P6, P7 and P14, participant P11 on the face of it was truly clear of his intention for starting an apprenticeship.

*"I'm doing a senior leaders exec MBA (Master of Business Administration), which I requested through my manager, I wanted it to look to progress within my role"*

At the time it did appear quite curious about his initial reasoning being for career progression, and it was notable that his response was to the point and very concise, it was especially interesting as he was already in a very senior position within a large multifaceted organisation. However, it did become more apparent that it was not only about career progression, but also an opportunity to address a feeling of self-doubt. During the interview, as P14 started to open-up further, he stated that:

*"I always had that nagging doubt, so I want to prove to myself that I can be an academic."*

The term P14 uses is interesting, 'nagging doubt', this gives the sense that it has been something that has been on his mind for a considerable amount of time. It also suggests that his perception of his 'academic' self is something that he is unclear on, however he also suggests by stating that he has something 'to prove' to himself, that he may have a lack of self-esteem. He clearly does have a feeling of determination to prove either to himself, others, or everyone, that he can achieve an academic status.

All participants within this sub-theme shared the emotion of being determined, passionate, and a sense of wanting to achieve the apprenticeship for more than just career progression, it appears as though whilst a change in career is undoubtedly part of their reasoning for choosing to start an apprenticeship, there is also this notion of them wanting to prove or achieve something that once appeared more challenging to achieve before starting the apprenticeship.

### **1b. Having to do an apprenticeship**

A few participants were required to complete an apprenticeship as part of their contract of employment. Their responses demonstrated mixed feelings about having to enrol to an apprenticeship. For P8, she did not believe her employer made it clear why she was required to complete an apprenticeship, indeed she was not aware of the fact that the apprenticeship was now part of her contract of employment.

*"I did not even think that would be something that I will be working [towards] when I first started... I just presumed [I was] going to learn as I am kind of going on with my role and developing those skills ...applying those kinds of skills from my practice."*

P8 works as a Doctor of Psychology in practice, she continues in this role as well as working as a Lecturer in a Higher Education establishment. Because her background is as a Clinician, she was expecting to learn how to teach, but expected this to be through continuous professional development, and through learning on the job. She was unaware that she was required to enrol to an apprenticeship programme. She did not realise that an apprenticeship could be a pathway to acquire teaching related knowledge, skills, and behaviours.

*"I've never heard of apprenticeships before in terms of like academic practice"*

P8, whilst clearly frustrated of having to do an apprenticeship, she does however remain positive about learning, and does recognise it as an opportunity to develop her pedagogical practice.

*"[The apprenticeship is] something I can do to strengthen my skill set and to make me a better teacher"*

P9 worked within the Police force, and like P8 wanted to work within a Higher Education establishment to teach. Unlike P8, P9 was aware that he would eventually need to enrol to an apprenticeship programme to learn how to teach.

*"I am hoping it will give me the skills I need to be a lecturer, [ I am a] police officer pretending to be a student [...]. Now I pretend to be [a] lecturer, so the apprenticeship [will] help me evolve and develop into a lecturer"*

In the interview, P9 appeared extremely confident, and his presence could be described as authoritative and one you would expect from a serving Police Officer or Chief Inspector. However, it was intriguing that he referred to himself as 'pretending' to be a student and a lecturer. When pressed on this, he states that:

*"I might sound a bit overconfident, but I have already achieved what I wanted out of my life. [...] as a child I wanted to be a Police Officer. I have worked hard to get to it and became it in the end."*

It was clear from his responses that he was finding it difficult to identify as something else outside of his distinguished role as a Police Officer. He makes it clear of his intention of why he wanted to start teaching in Higher Education, he states:

*"I am not embarrassed about being an apprentice. I am really proud to say [that I am]. It is giving me the chance to influencing the next generation of police officers."*

P9's intentions for enrolling to an apprenticeship are clear, he fully understood that he was going to be starting an apprenticeship eventually as part of his contract of employment, and the purpose for doing so. He is clearly passionate about the Police force and saw this as an opportunity to 'give something back' by teaching the next generation of Police Officers. There was clear convergence in P8 and P9 in terms of their motive of wanting to teach their profession within Higher Education, and for understanding the benefits of doing an apprenticeship as a pathway to support their pedagogical practice. The most interesting convergence is how they identify, both referred to themselves not as an apprentice, or a Lecturer, but as a Clinician or a Police Officer, respectively. Equally, the divergence between these participants was noteworthy. Despite, both participants' desire to teach their subject specialisms within the same Higher Education institution, their journey to becoming an apprentice was vastly different. Consequentially, one demonstrated some hesitancy about starting an apprenticeship, whereas the other is fully engaged in the apprenticeship journey.

### **1c. Fear of redundancy**

There were some participants that aligned to this sub-theme, they were clearly troubled, and emotionally discussed their experience of having to do an apprenticeship as a form of job security if they will become redundant. The participants made it clear that they were pleased to be on the apprenticeship, but they had not chosen to enrol to the apprenticeship out of choice, but more out of necessity.

P10 works within computer systems within a public organisation, he was extremely critical about his employer, he expressed his frustration using sarcasm as a method to express his annoyance with his employer, an example of this was with reference to pay:

*"they said [employer], well, normally we get a little school leaver and people like that wanting these roles, but I was 34 at the time they said [it], [my employer said] would you like to go into something a bit more challenging? I said I have no problem with that at all. [...] While I was still there in 2016, eventually, they gave me a permanent contract and I have stayed there ever since. I am still on the same money, but there we go."*

P10 was clearly aggravated about his current situation, his comments regarding 'little school leaver' suggests that he feels over-qualified or overlooked by his employer. In addition, the reference to being on the same money since 2016, again demonstrates his feelings of being undervalued. P10 clearly saw the apprenticeship as an opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills he will require to retain a job. The apprenticeship he chose was in project management, this was despite not being in a position within the organisation to meet the requirements of the occupational standard in project management. He stated that:

*"It is an ILM (Institute of Leadership & Management) level 5 in management. However, there is no project management in leadership where I work. I asked to do the apprenticeship for a career change, I do not think there will be a job here for me in the long run."*

P10 appeared to be in an inconvenient situation and was extremely negative about his apprenticeship journey, P10 was predicting that he was going to fail his apprenticeship programme.

*"Really, I do not feel now that I am able to ever pass this apprenticeship, you know, I have not done any work. I have supposed to finish this. I have no work that I can suggest is submittable."*

Another participant P12, like P10 was frustrated about her current situation within her occupation. P12 works within a large civil organisation for several years and has been through several cycles of staff restructures. P12 often referred to herself as a mature person and stated that her role was 'at risk' if she does not meet her targets.

*"I asked to do it [the apprenticeship] because I was concerned that I might be made redundant, and I simply need to work otherwise I will not afford to live... if I can be brutally honest ... I was going to be made redundant and they offered me a course."*

Like P12, P13 also works within a large multifaceted state funded organisation, her experience aligned very closely with P12. P13 appeared very complementary

about her employer at the start of the interview, and indeed also was enthusiastic about the opportunity the apprenticeship is providing her. However, during the interview, her level of enthusiasm significantly declined, and she appeared very troubled about her career longevity in her current role. She states that:

*"I asked my employer if I could do it [the apprenticeship], for job security [...]. We are behind target and if we lose the funding or the fundings clawed back, then I am at risk of losing my job."*

The group convergence was the feeling of being a mature student, the fear of losing their respective job roles, and a feeling of being undervalued by their employer. All participants were using the apprenticeship to upskill and for job security. There was no apparent divergence within this subtheme, only with non-verbal cues, P10 was clearly infuriated about his job context, for P12 she was clearly upset throughout the interview regarding her job prospects, whereas P13 only became upset once she started to talk through her current situation at her place of work.

## **2. Prior perceptions of apprenticeships**

From gaining an understanding of the participants' motive for starting an apprenticeship, it naturally led to a discussion regarding their previous, and in some cases, current perceptions of apprenticeships. This group experiential theme focused on the participants' prior understanding of what an apprenticeship is, and the characteristics of the individuals that the participants' thought apprenticeships were targeted towards. The sub-themes to capture these perceptions include: 2a Being for 'young people', 2b Vocationally focussed, 2c Aimed at the lower levels.

### **2a. Being for 'young people'**

All participants prior perception of apprenticeships referred to age, moreover, that apprenticeships were for 'young people.' This was particularly interesting, because most participants referred to themselves in theme 1 as a mature student during the discussion regarding their motive for doing an apprenticeship. P6's perception was formed from her experience of working within Further Education before moving into healthcare.

*"Most students were, young and low achievers and needed a different route to employment than university. So, I am not your typical apprentice."*



P6 appears to still consider age as a factor now, as she made the comment 'so, I am not your typical apprentice', which suggests her previous perception is one that still has some influence over her. P6 builds on this comment, by stating:

*"I didn't have that view when I asked to do an apprenticeship but was very aware that this stigma might be there with my employer because they may not know that things are different now with apprenticeships"*

This again indicates that P6 has some concern regarding how others may perceive her within her current occupation. Like P6, P7 raised her age but with more of a focus on the fact that she was lucky to be on an apprenticeship, despite being a mature student.

*"I was lucky actually I pretty much got this apprenticeship straight away, especially because I am, I am a mature student."*

The word P7 uses is 'especially', which suggests that she believes that apprenticeships are for 'young people' and that her employer may have the same view. Unlike P7, P8's educational background followed an 'academic' pathway through to post graduate study, before completing a PhD.

*"Generally, people say like younger people do apprenticeships, like plumbing or something like that [...] I've not really engaged in any conversation or had any kind of knowledge about apprenticeships to be honest."*

P8 had not experienced apprenticeships before being employed within Higher Education, her perceptions have been shaped by a third-party, by other 'people'. P8 is now aware that apprenticeships can be used across multiple disciplines, this has started to influence her current view of apprenticeships.

*"I'm just positive now about it, I'm hopeful that the learning journey will just give me the skills and enhance my ability to learn to make sure the students have a positive experience."*

Conversely, some of P9's family worked in Engineering, and had experienced being on an apprenticeship. P9's referred to this during his interview as a factor that moulded his perception.

*"Growing up apprenticeships were quite popular with young people. At the same time, as you are performing the role of say an engineer, you had to go to a classroom, learning about it, and then using what you have learnt whilst working on the job."*

Despite that his perception was that apprenticeships were for 'young people' he spoke proudly of the fact that apprenticeships provide an opportunity to learn a trade. P10 comments regarding his perception of apprenticeships were fashioned

by his experience within his current occupation, he did originally perceive that they were for 'school leavers'.

*"I made some reference to this in the questionnaire, but I absolutely had a perception that the apprenticeship was a vocational course for school leavers who wanted to get into more hands-on [learning] in industries like manufacturing, that kind of thing. To be honest, I did not really have a full understanding of it. The apprentices that we take on in the company are older, and do not appear remotely interested in the apprenticeship."*

P10 projected his sense of frustration regarding the choice of the apprentices that his current employer decided to employ.

*"The people [apprentices] we took on that were, well, not my perception was really about the kind of people that we have worked with, so we have three apprentices not school leavers, they were all in their mid 20s. They all had jobs in the real world. Very diverse range candidates. One was a restaurant manager who decided to get into engineering, which is an interesting journey for him. One was a DJ who was getting into his mid 20s and wanted a proper job if you like. And the other guy was, uhm, what would what did XXX do? I cannot remember, could not have been much then. but then again, he was 23 or 24 at the time."*

It is clear from P10's responses that his relationship with his current employer was problematic. Like with theme 1, P10 gives the impression of someone who feels undervalued and overlooked. This is more apparent from his further response regarding the destination of the diverse range of apprentices that he previously discussed, which he showed a level of satisfaction in the fact that one of them left the company.

*"Now the three apprentices that we have, well hard to explain, but they all have gone onto substantial roles within the company. They were all retained after their apprenticeship and offered permanent employment and I am very happy to say that one of them has now left us completely and pursued a career elsewhere"*

P11's view was mixed regarding his perception, on one hand, he saw an apprenticeship as an opportunity to reskill for anyone.

*"It's a way of upskilling in work for any position or age, [to] put it in layman's terms."*

On the other hand, he referred to the apprenticeship route as an option for 'young people.'

*"Young [people who] maybe looking at going to university or taking the apprenticeship instead of going to university, but these roles aren't advertised there like you can go and do it."*

P11 demonstrates some knowledge regarding apprenticeships, however the reference he made regarding 'these roles aren't advertised' is slightly misleading, as an apprenticeship is a job, and are often advertised through

multiple channels, including on the employer's website, job-boards, the linked trainer provider's website, and through the government's apprenticeship service. P11's opinion of apprenticeships was extremely positive; he was clearly passionate about apprenticeships, and the opportunities they bring to upskill.

*"But you know I'm passionate about it in my service, I have seen people who have taken on apprentices of all ages, especially if they're changing careers, it's a good foundation to change a career"*

This was a significant divergence when compared to P10's responses, which were more cynical about the value of apprenticeships. Unlike P11, P12 experience to date of apprenticeships was one of fear and was she clearly saw the apprenticeship route as a mechanism in which she could secure a job. She often referred to her own age as a factor throughout the interview, for example, she stated:

*"Because of my age, um, I'm menopausal and so I decided that when they were [her employer] sorted out it on an even keel that I would do something to test my ability to study, I am almost at the age of retirement, I need to still earn an income so this might give me some job security."*

P12 does however recognise that a variety of ages are using the apprenticeship as an option to upskill, she followed her previous response with:

*"It was only a recent transition because previously the apprenticeships were for young people up to the age of, I think it was 24, and but that was only because it was funded by the government."*

P13 shares a similar view to P12, P13 was working within a team to support unemployed individuals to secure a job role, she went into employment directly from leaving school, and did not have much exposure regarding apprenticeships prior to starting in her role. Her initial perception was that apprenticeships were aimed towards young people, she also experienced stigma from others that she works with regarding this.

*"Yeah, I think I think there's still quite a stigma around the fact that it's aimed towards young people with the people that I work with."*

Like with all participants, P14's view, despite working within an apprenticeship team in Higher Education was also influenced by his prior perceptions of apprenticeships. This was shaped by his mother who works with apprentices, which was that apprenticeships were for young individuals that wanted a different route to employment other than a standard college course or higher-level course.

*"My perception of apprenticeships was [that they were] for young people that were not quite clever enough to [go to a] university. [...] Recalling the fact that my mom works in apprenticeships for a private training provider, and she teaches level twos and threes in things like teaching assistant childcare. So that is what I thought on apprenticeship was. It was those kinds of things that influenced my view on apprenticeships. It was hands on skills rather than academia."*

However, like P11, P14 was very enthusiastic about apprenticeships, and his current perception is one that supports the notion that it is an opportunity for all individuals to reskill within their current occupation.

*"They are the opposite, the complete opposite. So, it is just work based learning, so it does not matter what the subject area is, what level is, your age, it is you are learning that counts, if you are working and you apply that knowledge to your job role, and then you are likely to be successful."*

There was clearly a group consensus regarding the fact that they all believe previously that apprenticeships were for 'young people.' The divergence was their individual experiences of apprenticeships to date, most participants were able to challenge their preconception of age being a factor for starting an apprenticeship. This was due to their experiences within their respective occupations, however for some, especially, P10, P12 and P13 their current experience of being an apprentice appears to re-enforce the perception of apprenticeships being targeted at 'school leavers' and/or 'young people'. Furthermore, a divergence within this sub theme, was with those that had a better understanding of apprenticeships, for example, P6, P9, P11, and P14 appeared to be progressing better, and engaging more, on their respective apprenticeship programmes than those that did not have a current understanding of apprenticeships, and whom they were targeted at.

## **2b. Vocationally focussed**

Most participants thought that apprenticeships were for vocationally based courses. Having worked in Further Education, P6 recalled upon that experience:

*"Back in my FE (Further Education) days, because most apprenticeships were for trades like construction and hair and beauty they were thought of as non-academic, but I know things changed from keeping up to date with announces from the government"*

Like demonstrated in the sub-theme 2a, P6's tries to keep abreast of policy announcements and so forth related to the apprenticeship provision. She is now aware that apprenticeships are used across several vocational and academic disciplines. It is still intriguing that P6 suggests that apprenticeships were thought of as non-academic, especially following trades in Construction, and Hair and Beauty, both of which do have higher technical skills aligned to each

occupation. This could suggest there may be a wider perception that vocational skills are not academic. P7 builds on her previous responses in the sub-theme 2a, she states that:

*"Always thought [apprenticeships] were for younger students, and those that wanted to do building and engineering"*

Like P7, for P8, apprenticeships were for the vocational trades, she had little awareness of apprenticeships being used for 'academic' pathways.

*"Never heard of apprenticeships before in terms of like academic practice [thought they were for] like plumbing or something like that"*

Again, like P6, it is interesting how P8 discusses vocational trades, which are often not thought of as academic, despite there being degree and post graduate level roles within these sectors. P9 similarly recognised an apprenticeship as being vocationally based:

*"Yeah, so historically when you [hear] the word apprenticeship, when it popped into my head, the first thing I thought about was engineering. [...] Never thought that they could be higher levels, like education."*

P9 also alluded to the fact that he was surprised that apprenticeships were available at the higher levels, this is despite that Engineering courses do traditionally go through to post-graduate study. P10 related apprenticeships to vocational courses, such as Manufacturing, and again was unaware that they were available for higher levels of learning.

*"I absolutely had a perception that the apprenticeship was a vocational course for school leavers who wanted to get into more hands-on in industries like manufacturing, that kind of thing. [...] I honestly did not know that higher level apprenticeships were available."*

P11, P12 and P13 did not relate apprenticeships to vocational skills, whereas P14 did, like described in the sub-theme 2a, P14's perception was shaped by his mother's experience of working within childcare apprenticeships. In addition, to this he stated that:

*"I thought an apprenticeship was more vocational, so it was hairdressing, construction."*

P14 view was shared with most participants, there was a group consensus that supported the notion that apprenticeships were for vocational courses. Moreover, there is a link between vocational courses more generally, in the fact that they are not seen as 'academic' or studied at the higher levels by the participants.

### **2c. Aimed at the lower levels**

Most participants frequently discussed how apprenticeships are aimed at the lower levels and low academic achievers. In the previous sub-themes, P6 and P9 both have made these assertions, respectively.

*"They were thought of as non-academic"*

*"Never thought that they could be higher levels, like education"*

Similarly, P10 shared this view, however his perception was shaped from his recent experience from working with apprentices within his department.

*"[that they were not for] someone in my position and thought they were mainly for administrative clerical role[s]."*

P10 suggests that he believe that apprenticeships were for junior roles, and not for those within management. For P11, who described his job role as one that promotes several different training options to employers and the local community. His experience of apprenticeships was that they were aimed at individuals who have low levels of attainment.

*"Most apprenticeships are for those with low levels of attainment take apprenticeships in the city is my theory."*

Conversely, P12 diverged from the group, and stated that her perception of apprenticeships was that they were for high achievers.

*"I did think they were for clever people, for academics, for people who, you know had a level of education... so, I always thought that you had to be quite smart to do an apprenticeship."*

P12's view may have been shaped by her own lack of academic confidence, which she discussed in the interview, P12 had seen her senior colleagues use the apprenticeship to upskill with their current role. P13 did not explicitly state that apprenticeships were for low-skilled job roles but indicated to this as she not aware that she could remain on her current salary before starting the apprenticeship.

*"I first started discussing this with my manager and she said no, I'd stay on my salary so that kind of pushed me a little bit more [and] encouraged me a little bit more because I knew that I wasn't going to be missing out."*

The group consensus was also that apprenticeships were for junior positions within an organisation and were mostly targeted towards with a lower level of prior academic achievements. P12 was the only divergence within this group, stating that opposite, as she assumed that apprenticeships were for academics.

### **3. Apprenticeship identity**

From establishing the participants' motives (theme 1) and perceptions of apprenticeships (theme 2), the interview focused on their lived experience during the first three months of starting an apprenticeship. The participants' lived experience was varied, some participants reported that their apprenticeship status was not being recognised by their respective employer and training provider. Other participants suggested that they had experience negativity from their co-workers because of being an apprentice. Finally, a few were becoming concerned how others may perceive them since enrolling to an apprenticeship programme. This group experiential theme is segregated into the following sub-themes: 3a Not being recognised as an apprentice; 3b Reaction to being an apprentice from others; 3c Employed apprentices receive a better level of support.

#### ***3a. Not being recognised as an apprentice***

There was significant frustration expressed from some of the participants regarding the lack of employer recognition of their apprentice status. For example, as previously described, prior to starting on the nursing apprenticeship P6 was working as a Healthcare Assistant with her current employer. Her experience was that her line manager continued to identify her as a Healthcare Assistant, and not as a Nursing apprentice. P6 was also concerned that if she showed any resistance to doing her old job role then her employer would not provide her with the necessary support required to become a nurse.

*"...the head nurse still saw me [as a] HCA [Health Care Assistant] and not as an apprentice nurse so she just expected me [to] do HCA duties and not nursing... it's a shame that this culture exists because there's a gun to your head like if you don't do the HCA role instead then I won't help you become a nurse."*

The culture within P6's work environment is questionable; P6 is having to experience a culture where she feels that if she does not do her previous duties as a Healthcare Assistant than she would not receive the support she is legally entitled to train as a Nurse. P6 was visibly troubled during her responses, but her articulation could be described as irritated, but with a sense of determination to overcome these barriers to achieve her status as a Nurse. P12 and P13's experience resonates with P6, they elicited a sense of fear, for P6 she portrayed this with a determination to overcome this challenge, whereas for P12 and P13 their non-verbal cues suggest they were feeling threatened and were overwhelmed. P12 and P13 suggested the following, correspondingly:

*"The fact that I'm only going to be working like four days a week and then the 20% off the job... has put a lot of stress on me because it was made very clear to me, I can do my apprenticeship and I can have my 20% off the job and they won't quibble about that... [but] they weren't going to change my targets."*

*"...there is no option now. We are behind target and if we lose the funding or the fundings clawed back, then I am a[t] risk of losing my job... [my] manager has said she would like to give me a reduction [in workload but] at the moment there is just no possibility with us being behind target."*

Both P12 and P13 appear to accept that they will just need to continue not being recognised as apprentices, especially as they have used phrases such as:

*'They were not going to change my targets,' 'there is no option now,' 'put a lot of stress on me,' and 'risk of losing my job.'*

Most participants were told that they could take time off-the-job, however due to no adjustments being made to their workload it was not possible, P10 and P11 respective statements, summarise the collective groups' responses.

*"My substantive job will still take up 100% of my time."  
"...life does not work at 20% does it. It is not possible with a fulltime job."*

For some of the group, they are given time off-the-job but due to a sense of supporting others within their place of work, they tended to continue with their previous workload as prior to starting their apprenticeship. For example, as stated previously, P9 worked within a higher educational setting, his previous role was a Police Officer, he often relates back to that experience to explain why he decides to commit to a full workload.

*"I am supposed to have Mondays [off-the-job], but I do what the job demands... I have diarised one to ones with students on Monday because there is no other time... I would not be a team player if I said oh no, I am not coming in to help. cause I am doing my apprenticeship today"*

P8 also shared a similar view to P9, as a result was not able to use her allocated time off-the-job to learn new knowledge, skills, and behaviours. From their collective responses, it does suggest that there is a form of unconscious bias or just simply a lack of apprenticeship understanding from their employer, as it is the employer's legal duty to ensure that workloads are adjusted to allow apprentices to take 20% off-the-job. For a few participants their experience was a divergence from the others, they were able to take 20% off-the-job and were given considerable support from their employer. For example, P7 worked within a digital marketing business, she is given 20% off-the-job and is provided with reassurance about how she is progressing, she states that:

*"My employer supports me though; they all get involved and give me time to complete my work... literally constantly saying to me stop just for one second and reflect on how much progress I have made."*



The group convergence was that most participants were not able to have the legal entitlement of 20% off-the-job during their working week, either because they were not given the time, or simply there were not reasonable adjustments made to their substantive post to ensure they had time during the working week to access their apprenticeship training. Some participants within this theme were experiencing a sense of fear of not maintaining their previous workloads, as well as now trying to complete a higher apprenticeship. For the few participants that had reasonable adjustments made to their workloads, and 20% off-the-job they were performing better on their apprenticeship, and within their current occupation.

### **3b. Reaction to being an apprentice from others**

Most participants perceived there was a negative reaction from their colleagues at their place of work from being an apprentice. This led to feelings of self-doubt, and it also became apparent that their previous preconceptions of apprenticeships were being reinforced. P6 previously stated that her perception of apprenticeships was that they were aimed at young people, and added that she:

*"Was very aware that this stigma might be there with my employer"*

P6 believed that a colleague was shocked that she was an apprentice because she was older than other apprentices within her cohort.

*"She looked shocked cause' I am older than other apprentices... she was like, oh I am surprised, I thought you wanted to remain as a Healthcare practitioner"*

There was some convergence within the group that they had experienced negativity since being an apprentice at their respective employing organisation. This particularly provoked some strongly worded responses from those participants, for P6, she states that apprentices are treated like novices, and are seen more as a hinderance.

*"The culture is not great, but it is worse for apprentices it is like they are novices so do not know what they are doing... I do not think they see them as equivalents more of a hinderance – they do not count towards the ward numbers."*

Like P6, P10 felt that because of the lack of support for apprentices, the business is failing.

*"Due to the lack of support for all [aspects of work] including my apprenticeship, the business suffered [..], I felt, well, that was a real failure of management."*

Finally, for P12 she suggested that her employer does not recognise the work that is required to complete an apprenticeship and does not feel able to challenge her employer's perception for fear of reprisal.

*"My employer as a whole does not recognise the work required on an apprenticeship, so they're not worth telling, they will see it as an excuse for not hitting my targets."*

The group convergence was one of where the participants either experienced or perceived negativity from others that they work with, especially when they compared their lived experience from after starting an apprenticeship as an existing member of staff.

### **3c. Employed apprentices receive a better level of support**

Some individuals are employed directly into an organisation on an apprenticeship role, whereas the participants within this study were all existing staff members that became an apprentice at a later point within their employing organisation. A few participants felt that individuals employed directly as an apprentice received better support and were recognised as having an apprenticeship status from their respective employers. P11 explained this as:

*"Employed apprentices, because you got a base level, and your boss already knows you do 20% training."*

P6 is taught with colleagues that were directly employed as an apprentice, she explained that from studying and working with these colleagues she is aware that they are treated differently compared to her experience.

*"[employed apprentices] follow a nurse round all day and learn lots from them because they are not counted in the numbers. But I am." (P6, Phase one, Interview one)*

The prominent convergence within the group was the experience of managing additional workload because of being an apprentice because their apprenticeship status was not recognised by their employer, for some this was clearly causing a sense of being overwhelmed and stressed. For a few of the participants, the convergence within that group was a feeling of acceptance that there was simply not going to be time to take the 20% off-the-job due to their busy workloads. A significant group convergence that became apparent was the fact that most participants had limited understanding of apprenticeship policy, and what they were legally entitled to as an apprentice. Only a few participants were able to confidently speak about what their rights were as an apprentice, for example, having 20% off-the-job learning. These participants were either working directly in apprenticeships or working within a training environment where

apprenticeships were regularly discussed, however these participants were in the minority, and were the divergence of the group.

#### **4. Having a sense of belonging**

Aligned to the research objectives, the participants were asked about access to communities of practice. All participants were provided with a definition of a community of practice, each participant was able to describe a group within their place of work where they have experience elements of a community of practice. The participants' comments in relation to being able to continue to access pre-existing communities of practice were evenly split. This theme was separated into two sub themes: 4a Access to pre-existing communities of practice with an employer; 4b Community of practice with peers.

##### **4a. Access to pre-existing communities of practice with an employer**

For some participants they have less access to pre-existing communities of practice within their respective job roles since becoming an apprentice. From the discussions, it was apparent that this was due to having less time to attend any of these groups because of starting an apprenticeship. P13 recognised from her place of work that it was at team meetings where she has shared good practice, learned from others, and felt part of an in-group with a common goal.

*"[other colleagues] They tend to do more meetings than me where we do share good practice and learn from one another, however I don't have time cause of the apprenticeship."*

P13 was not able to attend meetings due to her increased workload because of being an apprentice, whereas for P6 she feels like she is left out of meetings because of becoming an apprentice, as because she is not a 'proper Nurse'.

*"they're short staffed so I feel I get left out of team meetings, especially because I am an apprentice, and not a proper nurse."*

For P9 he does not have the time to be part of a community of practice with his colleagues due to his workload, however his statement suggests that this is the case for all his colleagues, and not because he is an apprentice.

*"I do not get much time spent with my peers. [...] we are not in the office in the morning. And there may be one or two there. And then they will shoot out to lectures, and I will spend the two hours there and then move on to the next session."*

P10 simply states that his manager does not see the apprenticeship as something that should be discussed within the workplace, especially as it is not his manager's concern, P10 expressed this as:

*"my manager would dismiss anything regarding my apprenticeship as something I should do in the evening, not his concern"*

Equally, some participants commented that they can continue to access communities of practice within their respective roles as they did before starting an apprenticeship. P14 who worked within an apprenticeship team for several years, commented that the apprenticeship team have regular meetings, where they share updates on funding rules, learn and support one another. He commented that these meetings are informal but is a space in which they have a common goal.

*"I still access all the same activities and learning groups as before I became an apprentice. For example, we discuss funding, share ideas, and discuss lessons learnt. Quite informal though, but it works."*

P7 values being able to continue to access existing communities within her respective job role, she can discuss her training with colleagues, and share her knowledge.

*"Yes definitely, we all have a passion for digital marketing, we meet up regularly to discuss how we are all doing, because we can learn from mistakes, and successes. We also discuss the best ways of managing clients, and what we have learnt from our individual training."*

There was an equally consensus, some participants could still access their existing communities of practice within their employment, however from this group a few were unable to attend due to their work commitments. For other part of the consensus, participants were not able to be part of an existing community of practice because of their apprenticeship status or were simply unable to discuss it out of fear of reprisal or for simply not being listen to.

#### **4b. Community of practice with peers**

Almost all participants commented that their training provider had not created a community of practice for apprentices to access outside of formal learning. This is well demonstrated from P7's experience, her formal learning is all online, lessons are for approximately 2 hours per week. She commented on how she is unable to build a rapport with her peers because of having no kind of community of practice established.

*"I mean, it would be good if there were... like a network thing set up and that kind of support[s] the group to share concerns and experiences. I do not even know what my peers look like, they keep their cameras off, we do not ever meet up, and are not encouraged to go into groups, or share ideas."*

A few participants decided to take matters into their own hands by setting up a community of practice using social media and messaging platforms. P12 demonstrates this by stating:

*"Cause the training provider did not set anything up for a group chat. So, what I have done is we have set up a WhatsApp group."*

Despite not having a formal community of practice, a few participants did suggest that their respective training providers did several activities to encourage apprentices to network and build a rapport. These participants used these activities to establish an informal community of practice with their peers, for example P14 who states:

*"They [training provider] didn't organise the group, but they did do lots of getting to know each other activities, this helped to break down barriers, and it's making me better at my apprenticeship."*

The divergence of the group in relation to this sub-personal experiential theme was P11, he commented on how effective his training provider was in providing several induction activities that helped him to build a rapport with his apprentice peers. However, in his case, the training provider also established some groupings within the class and encouraged them to meet on a regular basis outside of the formal learning setting to share ideas, debate, and to support and challenge one another.

*"Yeah, so we have got [a] study group. It has been good... I have benefited a lot from it, and for morale. We share ideas, discuss assignments, and we are relating how our jobs relate to the course... there is four of us... the induction activities arranged by them [training provider] really help[ed] us to gel, we were asked to form small working groups, which they called a community of learning."*

The convergence with all participants was that they saw the value in communities of practice within the workplace and their respective training provider, however, most did not have access to a community of practice within their off-the-job learning. The divergences within the group were the range of varied experiences in being able to access a community of practice, with only P11 suggesting that his training provided purposefully created a community of practice.

## **5. Quality of training**

Following the discussion regarding access to communities of practice, participants were encouraged to discuss the quality of on and off-the-job training during the first three-months of their lived experience as an apprentice. This group experiential theme is naturally split into two sub themes: 5a Quality of training from training provider; 5b Level of support provided by employer mentor.

### **5a. Quality of training from training provider**

A few of the participants' found that their respective training provider was providing good pedagogical practice and support. P11 is dyslexic, and because of this, he was initially concerned whether he would fit in with a class of post graduate apprentices. He described this feeling as though he was an imposter, however the support he has received from the training provider has made him more confident in his academic ability.

*"I think I was always good at being self-aware, but it's [sessions at the training provider] giving me techniques and how to reflect and learn from where I have already developed my skills from what I have learnt, the university is providing really engaging sessions, which I can link to my job."*

P8 was a divergence from this group, she was originally a Forensic Psychologist prior to changing careers to become a University Lecturer, her employer unfortunately timetabled her teaching on the day that she was supposed to be attending her apprenticeship training. Despite not being able to attend in-person, she watches the recorded sessions online on the days she is not teaching. She acknowledges that the sessions are insightful, and the training provider has done what they can do to support her. P8 discussed how she would have benefited from attending the sessions, and how this would have enabled her to contribute to the discussions. As a result, her pedagogical journey has not been as effective as she had hope for.

*"...because my teaching [is] on the apprenticeship training day, I have to catchup using the recorded sessions later in the week outside of my teaching... I wish I could attend the sessions, the sessions are good, and I have learnt so much from the recordings, but it [is] not [the] same as being there in person, so I can ask questions and get involved."*

Most participants expressed disappointment from the pedagogical practice provided by their respective training providers. For some within this group it was the lack of engagement from their provider, for example, checking on their progress. Some participants did not feel like the provider was recognising them as professionals and therefore no attempt was made by the training provider to encourage the participants to relate their industry experience within the context of the session. P7 demonstrated this by saying that there is no attempt made by the training provider to link the taught material to her industry knowledge.

*"I do think my training provider could do more to see me as an industry professional... they don't ask us enough about what we do and how it relates to the apprenticeship, there are sessions where I know I could contribute to a discussion, and I am sure other apprentices have something to add from their professions."*

Similarly, P12 discussed the lack of personalised support, however she voiced an elevated level of dissatisfaction in the teaching and learning that she was receiving from her training provider.

*"don't give you any personalised support [...] I shouldn't have to teach myself everything, they must play a part in that too."*

Most participants felt that the training provided by their respective training provider was not effective in supporting them to make progress on their apprenticeship programme, for some it was the lack of progress checks, whereas for others, it was the lack of personalised support, and recognition of their professional status in sessions.

### **5b. Level of support provided by employer mentor**

As stated by the ESFA funding rules (chapter one), all apprentices should be part of a tri-partite support group, this consists of an employer mentor who is from the apprentice's place of work, and a course tutor or assessor from the training provider, as well as the individual apprentice. Some participants were displeased with the level of support provided by their respective employer mentors. Some of which were unclear whether they had an employer mentor. P6 does not have a dedicated employer mentor, it depends on who is available during her shift within a Healthcare setting.

*"What do you mean by a mentor, because I don't have a specific one, it depends who is on the ward."*

In P12's situation, she has an employer mentor who attends tri-partite reviews with P12 and the training provider to discuss her progress on the apprenticeship, but P12 remained dissatisfied due to the lack of support provided in between the formal progress reviews.

*"there's a lot of talking, but there's not [a] great deal of support that comes from it."*

Like P12, P13 has an assigned employer mentor, but suggests that her mentor is rarely involved in support her, and P13 is unclear what support she should expect from her mentor.

*"[employer mentor] rarely does she get involved to support, and I don't know what to expect from her cause I don't know the internal processes"*

With exception to a few participants, the general convergence within the group is that the training they have received from a training provider has been disappointing, and training providers should do more to recognise the participants' industry experience as part of a taught session. There was some divergence within the group regarding the effectiveness of employer mentors,

for example P7 and P14 both suggest that they are supported by their employer mentors. P7 and P14 stated the following, respectively:

*"Employer supports me though; they all get involved and give me time to complete my work"*

*"Both my employer and the university provide a space to help me to learn and to be challenged"*

## **6. Training plan and reflection**

A training plan is supposed to be developed between the employer, training provider and apprentice to support alignment of an apprenticeship to on and off-the-job training as per ESFA funding rules (chapter one). The training plan should also encourage apprentices to reflect on what they have learned on and off-the-job. These findings have been listed under one sub theme: 6a Training plan and reflection.

### **6a. Training plan and reflection**

Most participants did not believe there was a training plan in place, or time allocated for reflection. P6 stated there is no training plan in place and continues to stress that the quality of training is dictated by who is on the ward on the day of her shift.

*"No plan, it depends on who is in, and who I can get hold of to train me."*

P7, P8 and P9, share the view of P12, P12 recognises the benefits of being able to reflect but is unable due to the lack of a training plan with allocated time for reflection.

*"When you're busy all the time, you don't have a chance to look back and see what impact it has"*

Like P6, P10 suggests there is no training plan, and shares similar views to P12 by simply stating that:

*"[there is] no room for that [training plan] or reflection"*

One participant indicated that a workplace training plan was used to support skills development and to schedule time for reflection. P14 states that there is plan in place between the employer, the training provider and him. He recognises that the plan is providing him with time to reflect, and to ensure that the apprenticeship is aligned to his job role.

*"Yeah, there is a plan between the employer, the university and me. It helps to ensure there is time for reflection, as well as ensuring that my apprenticeship is aligned to my job."*



The consensus within the group was that there was no training plan or time to reflect on their apprenticeship. There was only one participant, P14 that was able to confidently address this question from the participants.

**Phase One: Qualitative questionnaire**

To verify the findings from the phase one semi-structured interview, an anonymised qualitative questionnaire was conducted with the participants. Following the six phases of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), the qualitative responses from the questionnaire were thoroughly analysed this resulted in several initial codes. From examining the data to find coherent and meaningful patterns, these initial codes were then tested across the coded extracts. This resulted in the themes and sub-themes shown in table 8 below:

TABLE 8 PHASE ONE: QUALITATIVE QUESTIONNAIRE, THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Thematical Theme	Sub-theme
1. Perception of apprenticeships	1a. Aimed at work-based learners 1b. Aimed at 'young people' 1c. Skills development 1d. Vocational
2. Experience and/or information has influenced this perception	2a. Working within training 2b. From others 2c. Contractual obligation 2d. Interpretation of the funding rules
3. Impact of norms, values, and beliefs	3a. Positive impact 3b. Pessimistic positivity
4. Impact on professional identity	4a. Optimistic on having a positive impact 4b. Negatively impacting on professional identity
5. Current performance in apprenticeship job role	5a. No issues in performance 5b. Issues in performance on and off-the-job

The findings from these themes are explored further to detail the key features and trends in the data.

## **1. Perception of apprenticeships**

The participants were asked to explain their perception of apprenticeships, there were four themes identified from the collective responses.

### **1a. Aimed at work-based learners**

Most participants agreed that apprenticeships are aimed for those that are in work, or want to be employed, but continue to upskill.

One participant described their opinion as:

*"Earn while you learn on the job. Receive training whilst still being a contributing employee and receive academic education alongside the clinical training."*

This response states that an apprentice will receive training whilst still contributing to the business. It was interesting that they referred to the education as 'academic,' this could be because the training aligned to a clinical occupation, as opposed to a more traditional trade, e.g., Construction. Related comments included:

*"Work based learning that provides the opportunity to gain a qualification whilst working at the same time."*

*"Learning whilst working"*

*"Studying to learn a new trade or progression while training and working on the job"*

One participant provided further detail to clarify their comment:

*"In general, I am supportive of an 'on the job' development scheme where there is a recognised and valuable qualification presented at the conclusion. Apprenticeships are a great means of learning new skills and having an opportunity to test and refine them in the working environment. Therefore, blending theory and practice together, this, can also authenticate or provide gravitas to existing theories."*

This response demonstrates a clear understanding of how an apprenticeship should ideally be delivered within the workplace. It resonates with the experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984), where an apprentice can develop innovative ideas using theory and practice and reflect on the outcome by testing current ideas within the workplace.

### **1b. Aimed at 'young people'**

Some participants stated that apprenticeships were aimed at 'young people,' with one response suggesting that they are also low paid:

*"Hard work, time consuming, still thought of as a younger persons' qualification and low paid. I am still unsure how I feel personally about apprenticeships other than they do offer a fantastic opportunity to gain a qualification and learn a role."*

This comment does suggest that this was a previous perception, although this participant remains unsure how they feel about apprenticeships, but they do acknowledge that they are a good opportunity to achieve a qualification and develop into a new occupation. Another participant stated that they thought apprenticeships were aimed at 'young people,' especially for individuals that did not want to study in a post-16 setting, and instead wanted to 'earn and learn' at the same time.

*"My general perception was that apprenticeships were really for young people who did not want to go into further education and wanted to earn money whilst they were learning. I thought it would be too much work to run a household, look after a family, work, and study."*

This participant also suggests that it would be difficult to have other responsibilities, alongside work and study.

### **1c. Skills development**

One participant stated that an apprenticeship is positive for individuals that want to develop their skills:

*"Positive and impactful on skills attainment, however the need to reach a grade C in English and Maths is a barrier for the harder to reach, who would benefit the most from apprenticeships"*

This participant also identified a barrier for individuals to access an apprenticeship because of the requirement for apprentices to achieve English and Maths qualifications at grade C (now known as a grade 4) or above.

### **1d. Vocational**

One participant stated that they did not have much knowledge about apprenticeships before starting in their current occupation. Their response suggests that their educational background was through a traditional academic pathway:

*"Before starting in my current workplace, I had limited understanding of what an apprenticeship was or how one worked. I had an academic education through to university level and had a general perception of apprenticeships as vocational, old-fashioned, and manual. Since*

*beginning to work in the energy industry my view developed, understanding that apprenticeships could offer high levels of advanced skills, but that this depended very much on the apprentice's supervisor in the workplace, and that their development was entirely in the hands of the more experienced colleague."*

The participant's perception was that apprenticeships were vocational, and 'old-fashioned' and manual. This perception also states that an apprentice's development is entirely determined by their employer mentor.

## **2: Experience and/or information has influenced this perception**

Participants were asked to describe what experience and/or information has shaped their perception of apprenticeships. Their responses were categorised into four sub-themes.

### **2a. Working within training**

Two participants' perceptions of apprenticeships were formed because of working within a training environment:

*"Working within xxxx and the apprenticeships team."*

*"A background in FE, although not specifically with apprenticeships has given me a good insight into how apprenticeships work."*

It is evident that these participants' perceptions were shaped from these prior experiences of working with a training provider, one participant is still currently working within this occupation, and directly in apprenticeships.

### **2b. From others**

Most participants' perceptions were shaped by other individuals' experiences and views about apprenticeships. One participant stated that:

*"Speaking with customers, friends and colleagues and hearing their reactions and responses to me stating that I am doing an apprenticeship."*

Similarly, another participant was influenced because of his father's experience of supporting apprentices at his place of work.

*"From growing up. As a child my father worked at xxxx. He was influential in supporting apprentices in the workplace, providing tutorship, and mentoring to enable them to both understand the theory and develop 'on the job' context. At the conclusion of their apprenticeship, they were both able to provide a qualification and, the more important 'experience' of practice. I am more comfortable conducting 'on the job' learning rather than studying for 2 years to be qualified to teach. It enables me to develop at my own pace and test assumptions and theories as I settle in the academic culture."*

This response also demonstrates that this participant feels a sense of pride being an apprentice, it also suggests that the apprenticeship has enabled him to pursue a change in career as a teacher. One response states that the participant had not previously experienced much vocational education, which suggests that they may view apprenticeships as just vocational:

*"My background was primarily academic (11+, grammar school, university) with my only real vocation experience being in music. All my school colleagues went to university or straight into the world of work. My experience of finishing GCSEs was that the only people who would consider apprenticeships were those who were not academically gifted and who needed additional post-16 support to enter the world of work."*

Moreover, this response also suggests that because of their experience of apprenticeships through the lens of others, they have the perception that apprenticeships were for individuals that have not achieved a high-level of attainment. The final participant for this sub-theme first explored apprenticeships to examine whether they would provide them with a suitable learning pathway:

*"I had looked up what being an apprentice involved to see if it was something that would suit me plus I had had friends that had done apprenticeships in the past with other professions."*

This participant's perception of apprenticeships was also formed through their friendship group, especially with those who have previously completed an apprenticeship within other occupations.

### **2c. Contractual obligation**

One participant suggested that they are not learning new skills, as they were already qualified to perform their role:

*"I did not need to become qualified to perform my role prior to employment. However, I am obliged to conduct education whilst in the role as a condition of my employment."*

As per ESFA funding rules, an apprenticeship should be used to acquire new knowledge, skills, and behaviours (chapter one) so in this situation, with exception to it being a condition of their employment contract, it suggests that this participant may not benefit from completing an apprenticeship programme.

## **2d. Incorrect interpretation of the funding rules**

One participant was influenced by reading government announcements:

*"Prior to the recent changes brought about by government, they were designed for young people. It was clear from the advertising linked to apprenticeships. In addition, it is my opinion that no one can sustain a home on an apprenticeship wage."*

It is evident that this participant recognises that apprenticeships have been reformed, however, it remains unclear whether they have interpreted the funding rules correctly, for example, whilst there is a minimum apprenticeship wage, there is no maximum wage. It is also clear that the participant still held this view at the time of completing the questionnaire.

## **Theme 3: Impact on norms, values, and beliefs**

The participants were asked to explain how their perception of apprenticeships could impact on their norms, values, and beliefs within employment, especially compared to when they were not enrolled to an apprenticeship. This question provoked varying levels of positivity, this resulted in the two following sub-themes:

### **3a. Positive impact on norms, values, and beliefs**

Some participants saw their perceptions of apprenticeships as having a positive influence over their employment experience. One response suggested that it has increased their network and has enabled them to explore aspects of their role in more depth.

*"It has made me more assertive and proactive, speaking with people I would not normally have been in contact with and look at things in more depth. It has however brought more responsibilities as now I am taking more on within the team. I am still completely committed to supporting my customers but now look at how my actions may be used as evidence within my apprenticeship. On the whole colleagues are very supportive and apprenticeships are looked upon positively."*

Within this same response, it was surprising that this participant's responsibilities with the team have increased, this may be positive if these additional duties align to the apprenticeship standard being studied. In addition, this comment also suggests that the participant's job role is now shaped by their apprenticeship by encouraging them to reflect on their actions and using this reflection as evidence towards their apprenticeship programme. Other related comments within this theme include:

*"I feel that being part of a recognised learning environment will support my transition into academia. I have come from 26 years of the Policing environment, which is very much tattooed into my psyche. The apprenticeship programme will allow me to develop but, to also understand the academic personality, recognise the behaviours, and add them to my own toolkit to enable me to blend in and be recognised as a colleague, enhancing my own academic identity."*

*"It can only really impact on my values and beliefs if they are at odds with my own. The university's code of ethics mirrors my own, so I do not see a negative impact. The norms however are different. I am used to working in a dynamic environment, education does not appear to be as impatient as my previous role within Policing. Therefore, there is some period of transition required."*

All responses within this sub-theme were positive about how their perception of apprenticeships will impact on their norms, values, and beliefs.

### **3b. Pessimistic positivity**

Some participants' responses elicit a feeling of positivity, but also suggest some form of pessimism in terms of the impact on their lived experience as an apprentice. One response demonstrates how the participant's perceptions have positively changed since starting an apprenticeship, and now can consider how apprenticeships are having an impact on others. This response does not discuss the potential impact on their own norms, values, and beliefs, but considers an organisational impact.

*"My perceptions have changed a lot since entering my current workplace and I now have a deeper appreciation of how skills and knowledge can be transferred via the apprenticeship process. I now view our apprentices as (potentially) the future of the organisation and understand that a lot could be riding on their shoulders in three- or four-years' time. However, I also see that as all of them joined us at a very young age (16), they may not have decided what they want to do with their lives in the next few years, and I am aware that the effort we have spent training them could be for nothing as they develop as young people and are potentially either tempted by other career paths or other sectors."*

Within this same response, the participant references age as a factor in others that work as an apprentice within the organisation, and views this pessimistically by suggesting the time spent training other apprentices wasted if they leave their employment. Another participant within this sub-theme suggests there will be limited impact on their lived experience, however, does go further by suggesting that their influence as a manager will be impacted since becoming an apprentice, resulting in them not being able to influence decision making within their organisation.

*"I do not think it will impact me too much if it means I get to learn more stuff, I think this would be a quicker way to understand what I was*

*learning. Going from a management job to an apprentice would mean I would have to take a back seat to decisions though which would be strange at first but then I will get used to it."*

The following participant's response suggests their experience differs from the previous participant:

*"Until recently I would never have considered undertaking an apprenticeship. I thought it was something you did when you first started within a job not when you have been established in a role. Taking on additional responsibilities is a chicken and egg situation. I am busy in my role and additional responsibilities would increase the pressure and for no gain. XXX has not been interested in investing in me until now and I would not get any more pay for taking on a duty which someone else is being paid to do. XXX cannot has cut our wages and increased our duties already, spreading resources very thinly. It is only because of the Apprenticeship Levy I am on one now. I do feel more valued now as I believe they have invested in me; it is not just a 1-sided relationship."*

This participant believes that their responsibilities have increased because of starting an apprenticeship and goes further to state that as an established staff member the apprenticeship will not improve their knowledge, skills, and behaviours. They do however feel more valued because of their employer investing in them.

#### **4. Impact on professional identity**

The participants were encouraged to consider the impact of being an apprentice on their professional identity.

##### **4a. Optimistic on having a positive impact**

Some participants were optimistic that being an apprentice will improve their professional identity. For example, one participant discusses how their work is now being recognised by the wider organisation:

*"Because of the positive response it is useful to state to others that I am undertaking an apprenticeship as many have offered support or shadowing opportunities, so therefore the hard work is recognised. My perception of the qualification allows me to be open about it."*

Another participant previously did not have a succession plan in place, but now believes that the apprenticeship is supporting them to recognise their own worth, and that their colleagues are now taking them seriously as a professional.

*"Before my apprenticeship I did not see any chance for progression, again, the chicken and the egg. No investment/training no chance of progression. I have a chance to show people what I know, the knowledge/experience gained. Putting it down on paper is helping me to*



*realise and value who I am and what I know. People look at me now as someone who does want to progress and be taken seriously."*

Similarly, the participant's response below suggests that they were experiencing self-doubt regarding their professional identity from before starting the apprenticeship:

*"[...] lets first start with how I see myself.... I am a xxx in a strange environment, am I fake? am I a fraud? I see the apprenticeship as being one of the vessels to enable me to feel that I genuinely belong in this academic environment. Learning from my peers and with a bit of luck, the peers learning from the value that I bring to academia. I am confident that I will evolve and be viewed as an academic that used to be a xxx practitioner rather than an xxx that is new to teaching and academia."*

This comment also suggests that the participant lacks confidence with their own academic ability, however they view the apprenticeship as a 'vessel' in which they can use to improve their professional and academic status within their employment.

#### **4b. Negatively impacting on professional identity**

Some of the participants were experiencing a feeling of a loss of professional identity because of starting an apprenticeship. One participant believes that because of becoming an apprentice it has 'diminished the respect' their colleagues have for them at his place of work:

*"I feel that taking on the apprenticeship has diminished the respect my colleagues have for me in the workplace, especially as I am considerably older than most of them, and already have a tertiary level qualification. My superiors see the apprenticeship as something that keeps me busy, and colleagues at my level in the organisation see it as something which I am not suited to. I feel infantilised by taking this on, and none of my managers nor colleagues seem to take me seriously."*

It is evident that this participant does not believe that the apprenticeship is being used to support their progression, but as a vehicle to keep them occupied at work. The response also makes links to a feeling of being 'infantilised,' which suggests that the participant feels that their involvement in the apprenticeship in some ways denies their maturity in age or experience at their place of work. Like the previous participant, the response from another participant references age:

*"When you think of an Apprenticeship you do normally think of an 18-year-old, I am a mature apprentice so sometimes I do find myself feeling a bit, not embarrassed, but very aware that this is the case, and this could reflect on speaking out sometimes."*

In this response, the participant is more concerned about how others may perceive them now as an apprentice, which impacts on their confidence to engage in professional conversations at work. Similarly, two other participants expressed their concerns about how colleagues' perceptions impact on their professional identity:

*"I think sometimes being given the 20% off the job time can be seen as a hinderance by colleagues who might have to cover workloads whilst completing off the job training hours."*

*"I expect a lot from my employers and often am disappointed by their perception of the apprenticeship and the lack of on-the-job training, unless I constantly push for more."*

Both these responses suggest that culturally apprenticeships are not understood by their employers, either in terms of understanding of the requirement for 20% off-the-job training, or from the general negative perceptions of the importance of aligning training and work responsibilities to the apprenticeship programme.

### **Theme 5: Current performance in apprenticeship job role**

To further understand the participants' lived experience, it was prudent to explore how they believed they were performing in their current occupation, and one in which they are now an apprentice. A few participants suggested that they were doing well in their job role since becoming an apprentice, whereas others suggest either a lack of performance, or a lack of engagement from their employer in supporting them to make progress on their respective apprenticeship programmes.

#### **5a. No issues in performance**

One participant clearly has embraced his position as an apprentice, and because of this has 'dived' into his role, and is contributing to the students' experience, and the wider organisation:

*"I have dived into my role, presenting my own and other [colleagues] lectures, supporting staff and students, mentoring, and tutoring students and really enjoying myself. The context that I provide to students studying professional xxx motivates the student and I. My unique selling point is that I love talking about xxx, I am enthusiastic about the detail, the stories and I am genuinely jealous of their position, age, and future opportunities."*

There were a few participants aligned to this sub-theme, all of which acknowledged that there were no concerns relating to their performance at work.

### **5b. Issues in performance on and off-the-job**

Most participants' responses suggest either an impact on their performance at work or in respect to the apprenticeship training, which should also make up at least 20% of their time at work. A participant describes their role as very intensive, and as a result they are unable to make use of the 20% off-the-job time to complete their training:

*"My role is very intensive, high volumes of customers, at times intensive and sensitive support required on a target focussed project as well as other requirements within the team such as hosting webinars, attending training, and a busy meeting schedule, so can be very difficult to juggle and I am finding that trying to do an apprenticeship in this setting rarely works so end up doing it in my own time."*

Similarly, another participant is not getting access to 20% off-the-job because of no reasonable adjustments being made at their place of work:

*"I am performing all my duties well, despite not having my targets adjusted to taking into consideration my 20% off the job requirement of my apprenticeship."*

Another participant is unclear how they are performing, this suggests a lack of progress reviews from their employer and training provider. They are also unclear whether they should be doing more work towards their apprenticeship:

*"Sometimes I am performing well other times I wonder if I am not picking things up enough which is frustrating. I do think sometimes is there more stuff I should know and be doing."*

Finally, one participant is not positive about their position in their organisation:

*"It is very clear that what positive progress I was making in the role over the last few years has been resisted by my line manager and others within the organisation, and during a recent period of annual leave, much of my work was stopped, undermined, or erased. I am seeking urgent meetings with my manager to discuss my role and future, if any, within the organisation, though he has refused to take my calls, see me in person, and now communicates through a colleague, having changed my work to office junior level tasks such as filing."*

This response demonstrates a breakdown in relationship between the participant and employer, it is also evident that since becoming an apprentice their role has been negatively impacted, and because of this they are having to do work which they deem as junior to their established position within their employment.

## Phase One: Findings (0-3 months)

From cross analysing the findings from the semi-structured interview and qualitative questionnaire from phase one, the following trends have been identified, and have been aligned against a positive or negative experience.

Table 9 lists the findings that are most common amongst the participants:

TABLE 9 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, MOST PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCE (0-3 MONTHS)

<b>Most Participants:</b>	
<b>(Positive Experience)</b>	<b>(Negative Experience)</b>
asked their employer whether they could enrol to an apprenticeship programme with a feeling of excitement and optimism	perceptions were shaped by other individuals' experiences and views about apprenticeships.
enrolled to an apprenticeship to achieve more than just career progression	previously thought apprenticeships were aimed at 'young people,' junior positions, and for vocational sectors
were now able to challenge their preconception of age being a factor for starting an apprenticeship	are unable to have the legal entitlement of 20% off-the-job during their working week
saw value in communities of practice within the workplace and their respective training provider, despite that, most did not have access to a community of practice within their off-the-job learning	received a negative reaction from their colleagues at their place of work from being an apprentice
	respective apprenticeship status was not recognised by their employer
	had limited understanding of apprenticeship policy, and what they were legally entitled to as an apprentice
	respective training providers had not created a community of practice

	expressed disappointment of the pedagogical practice provided by their respective training providers
	did not have a training plan in place, or time allocated on their apprenticeship for reflection
	encountered issues relating to their performance at work or in respect to their apprenticeship training

Table 10 lists the findings that are shared with some of the participants:

TABLE 10 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, SOME PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCE (0-3 MONTHS)

<b>Some participants</b>	
<b>(Positive Experience)</b>	<b>(Negative Experience)</b>
	were clearly troubled because of having to do an apprenticeship as a form of job security if they will become redundant.
	experienced a sense of fear of not maintaining their previous workloads, as well as now trying to complete a higher apprenticeship
equally, could continue to access communities of practice within their respective roles as they did before starting an apprenticeship.	have less access to pre-existing communities of practice within their respective job roles since becoming an apprentice
saw their perceptions of apprenticeships as having a positive influence over their employment experience.	were displeased with the level of support provided by their respective employer mentors
	respective responses elicit a feeling of positivity, but also suggest some form of pessimism in terms of the impact on their lived experience as an apprentice.

were optimistic that being an apprentice will improve their professional identity.	equally, experienced a feeling of a loss of professional identity since starting an apprenticeship.
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Table 11 lists the findings that are shared with a few of the participants:

TABLE 11 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, A FEW PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCE (0-3 MONTHS)

<b>A few participants</b>	
<b>(Positive Experience)</b>	<b>(Negative Experience)</b>
asked their employer whether they could enrol to an apprenticeship programme with a feeling of excitement and optimism	were required to complete an apprenticeship as part of their contract of employment.
had reasonable adjustments made to their workloads, and 20% off-the-job	do not identify as an apprentice or as their position within their employing organisation (i.e., Lecturer), instead they identify as their previous occupations (i.e., Clinician, Police Officer)
were able to confidently speak about what their rights were as an apprentice	have low confidence in their own academic ability
found that their respective training provider was providing good pedagogical practice and support	felt that individuals employed directly as an apprentice received better support and were recognised as having an apprenticeship status from their respective employers
had a training plan in place, or time allocated for reflection	had a feeling of acceptance that there was simply not going to be time to take the 20% off-the-job due to their busy workloads
acknowledged that there were no concerns relating to their performance at work.	did not believe that they were learning new skills

In addition to analysing the trends in phase one, Table 12 shows the retention rate of the participants from month zero to three on their respective apprenticeship programme.

**TABLE 12: MONTH 3 PARTICIPANT RETENTION RATE**

<b>Month</b>	<b>Original sample size</b>	<b>Retention</b>	<b>Explanatory notes</b>
<b>Month 0-2</b>	9 participants	100%	All participants actively enrolled to an apprenticeship
<b>Month 3</b>	7 participants	78%	Two participants withdrew from their apprenticeship programme (P10, P13)

Participants P10 and P13 withdrew from their respective apprenticeship programmes during month three. These participants confirmed that this was due to a lack of employer support, highlighting that their employer did not provide them with the 20% off-the-job training as one of the main factors. From reviewing their collective data both participants shared the same trends in their dataset:

- a) Starting an apprenticeship due to the fear of being made redundant
- b) Perceptions were shaped by other individuals' experiences and views about apprenticeships
- c) Had limited understanding of apprenticeship policy, and what they were legally entitled to as an apprentice
- d) Have less access to pre-existing communities of practice within their respective job roles since becoming an apprentice
- e) Were displeased with the level of support provided by their respective employer mentors
- f) Experienced a feeling of a loss of professional identity since starting an apprenticeship
- g) Have low confidence in their own academic ability
- h) Felt that individuals employed directly as an apprentice received better support
- i) Had a feeling of acceptance that there was simply not going to be time to take the 20% off-the-job due to their busy workloads
- j) Did not believe that they were learning new skills
- k) Received a negative reaction from their colleagues at their place of work from being an apprentice
- l) Expressed disappointment of the pedagogical practice provided by their respective training providers

- m) Did not have a training plan in place, or time allocated for reflection
- n) Encountered issues relating to their performance at work or in respect to their apprenticeship training

### **Phase One: Synopsis of Findings**

From analysing the data from phase one, it suggests that participants who had a good understanding of what they were entitled to as an apprentice, were overall more satisfied with their apprenticeship journey during month zero to three. These participants were also satisfied with the level of support they received from their employer. Whereas the participants who had limited or no understanding of what they are entitled to as an apprentice, and that shared the perception that apprenticeships were for 'young people,' junior positions, and for vocational sectors; these participants experienced a perceived loss of professional identity relating to their organisational standing. Participants P10, P12, and P13 were required to become an apprentice due to risk of redundancy and stated that they were not given adequate support from their respective employer, and they were not satisfied with their apprenticeship training. From these participants, P10, and P13 withdrew from the apprenticeship programme in month three, this trend suggests that P12 is also at-risk of withdrawing from her apprenticeship programme.

Most employers provided limited or no apprenticeship support for their employee. The common trends were a lack of any training plan or adjustments to ensure the employee can access at least 20% off-the-job training; no named employer mentor; and opportunities during the 80% on-the-job training were not align to the respective apprenticeship's knowledge, skills, and behaviours. In addition, this group of participants included those who either perceived or did experience a negative reaction from their colleagues because of being an apprentice. Most participants were not encouraged either by their respective employer or their training provider to reflect on their apprenticeship programme holistically, therefore there was limited opportunity to recognise links between on and off-the-job learning, and to develop and implement innovative ideas derived from that reflection.

The participants that could continue to access communities of practice within their occupation, as well as those provided by a training provider are having a better lived experience during their apprenticeship programme. Most training providers did not provide a community of practice outside of any formal learning



to enable the participants to engage in conversation, share concerns and share good practice. Most participants were not satisfied with the pedagogical delivery provided by their respective training provider. The same group of participants made comments that suggested that their apprenticeship identity was not being recognised by their employer, and similarly, their industry professional identity was not valued by the training provider.

### **Phase Two: Findings**

Following the findings from phase one, the next stage of the research was to explore the lived experiences of the participants over three to six months.

### **Phase Two: On-Programme (3-6 months)**

Phase two included a focus group and a qualitative questionnaire. The purpose of this phase was to examine the lived experiences of participants to determine how their perceptions have developed over a three-to-six-month period, and to establish how being an apprentice as an existing staff member has impacted on their job role, identity, and their progress towards completing their apprenticeship programme.

### ***Phase Two: Focus Group***

At this stage, the participants' apprenticeship journey is within three to six months, thus they will be experiencing the reality of becoming an apprentice as an established member of staff. This section focuses on the results of the focus group using Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis. Consequentially, the following initial codes were identified and then verified across the coded extracts for the focus group. This resulted in the themes and sub-themes in table 13.

TABLE 13: PHASE TWO, FOCUS GROUP THEMES

Thematical Theme	Sub-theme
1. Balancing workload and training	1a. Concerned about workload
2. Flexibility and 20% off-the-job	2a. Access to 20% off-the-job training
3. Access to community of practice	3b. Community of practice 3c. Participation in community of practice
4. Apprenticeship experience	4a. Contact with trainer/assessor 4b. Lived experience as an apprentice
5. Professional status	5a. Professional identity 5b. Organisational standing
6. Employer knowledge	6a. Apprenticeship awareness

The findings from these themes are explored further to detail the key features and trends in the data. The participants fully engaged in the focus group, and despite being offered to leave their cameras off, they all decided to be visible during the discussion. It should be noted that P8 was unable to attend the focus group due to becoming ill. At first the participants were being cautious about contributing, however, once one participant spoke frankly about their experience the other participants quickly adjusted and became more vocal. The participants were required to complete a pre-focus group activity to encourage them to consider what their original concerns were, and whether these concerns became a reality during their lived experience. A total of six participants took part within focus group discussions.

### **Theme 1: Balancing workload and training**

The group consensus was that most participants were concerned about their respective workloads since becoming an apprentice as an existing member of staff.

#### **1a. Concerned about workload**

The participants discussed their concern about managing workload as an existing employee that has become an apprentice. P9 states that:

*"Whilst I try to find the time to complete the apprenticeship, I do end up covering lots of sessions due to sickness, so the apprenticeship has to be done at evenings and weekends at the moment."*

Similarly, P6 agreed with P9 by stating:

*"Similar to the others, I find myself covering staff, and [other] apprentices across different departments within my employment we get varying levels of support and protected time to complete apprenticeship training"*

Like during phase one, P12 also refers to her age as an additional factor to managing her workload:

*"This is similar to me, and as a very mature person I find this extremely difficult to manage, especially as I need more time to absorb what I am supposed to be doing on the apprenticeship"*

Only P7 was the divergence within the group, she was less concerned about her workload becoming an issue, especially because she knew her employer was committed to giving her time for off-the-job training.

## **Theme 2: Flexibility and 20% off-the-job**

As discussed in theme one, the group convergence was that most participants were struggling to manage their workload since starting an apprenticeship. A key factor that emerged from the discussions was flexibility and access to off-the-job training.

### **2a. Access to 20% off-the-job training**

Most participants were either not provided with 20% off-the-job training or were unable to use the time allocated due to their workloads. For example, P6 states that:

*"I don't get any time given, you know, within my work roster, yeah, I'm very similar to P9 and P12 who said it's done in their own time because quite frankly it's just not possible otherwise"*

P11 discusses how it was easier before the Covid-19 pandemic to access off-the-job training and focus on his studies:

*"When I have been at university during the last two years it has been hard to escape it [work] really. Because of Covid, you are on teams, and your emails are popping up. And yes, you have options to hide them, but this is easier said than done sometimes, so whereas before the pandemic [when] I was going to university, I could separate myself when I was learning."*

It is apparent from P11's response that whilst he could access off-the-job learning, his experience of being able to focus on his training was impeded because of having to attend sessions online because of lockdown.

P12 expressed her frustration by stating:

*"[My employer], they're great at saying to us, you know, that you can do your 20%, but actually they don't give you the time to have it."*

P12's non-verbal cues gave a sense of feeling let down by her employer, she builds on her previous comment by providing an example of when her employer says that she is entitled to the 20% off-the-job during her progress reviews with the training provider.

*"When we have the reviews [with the training provider], my manager will say to my tutor, well, we don't tell her she can't do 20% off-the-job"*

In phase one, P12 discussed that whilst she has been given 20% off-the-job, her targets have not been decreased by 20%, therefore P12 is now finding it difficult to complete her work over four days per week, unlike her non-apprentice colleagues who are able to achieve their respective targets over a full working week. The divergence within the group was with P7 and P14, their lived experiences were more positive. P7 states that:

*"I've been lucky in that my employer gives me a lot of time to be able to do my apprenticeship side of it within the 20% off-the-job learning time"*

Since phase one, P7 has consistently commented on how supportive her employer is, and indeed previously explained how her line manager takes an active role in supporting her with the training. P14 works within an apprenticeship team, and like P7 he is given the time to complete his off-the-job training:

*"I think because I work within apprenticeships at XXXX, we really do have to practice what we preach in terms of support and the 20% off the job."*

During this discussion, participants often referred to the lack of flexibility alongside their dialogue regarding accessing off-the-job training, for most, this is a group convergence.

### **Theme 3: Access to community of practice**

All discussions relating to communities of practice provoked several distinct aspects relating to their lived experience. These varied lived experiences were expressed through individual involvements of accessing communities of practice within their training provider. This resulted in the following sub-themes: 3a. Access to a community of practice, and 3b. Participation in community of practice.

#### **3a. Access to community of practice**

With exception to a few participants, most respective training providers did not create a community of practice from which the participants could share ideas and have a support network with their peers. P12 provoked the conversation through discussing how valuable it has been to work with other apprentices. However, when asked whether the training provider encouraged this grouping, P12 responded with:

*"I set it up off my own accord because I'm quite a social person and I thought that, you know, sharing the experience with people like-minded, and in a similar situation would be useful for everybody, not just me, because there were some people on our course who has, and who has not, got the level of knowledge or experience needed for the course."*

P6 responded to this, and like P12 she also created the group without direction from her training provider:

*"no one else will know this here, but I used to be a teacher, so I kind of know quite a lot about apprenticeships and how they work, so I set up a WhatsApp group and it's useful because people do ask questions and some people never engage."*

As discussed in phase one, before working in Healthcare P6 worked within Education, interestingly she was a qualified teacher. P6 was aware of the benefits of having a community of practice in place, and like P12 she created her own network of peers that shared the goal of becoming a Nurse. Unlike P6, P11 stated that his training provider purposively created a community of practice, however since phase one he has narrowed the membership of the original group with members that he has more in common with.

*"We did as apprentices [have a community of practice], so we had a study group, now it is our own break off study group of about four people, we can now be kind of more open and honest than you would in a larger group. And I found that more useful."*

P7's off-the-job training took place entirely online, in phase one she discussed how the group kept their cameras off during online sessions, therefore she was unclear what her peers looked like, and was unaware of their respective experiences. P7 stated that:

*"That is one thing [community of practice] that we are missing. I think that they [training provider] should have made, or they should start providing something like that."*

P7 builds on this by suggesting that a community of practice would have helped her and others to share ideas and support one another. P7 uses the example of one of her peers who left the apprenticeship because of struggling with the taught material.

*"You know something like a chat where we could share feelings and stuff that's going on, because like for instance with one of our peers that quit, this maybe could have helped her"*

P14's training provider did not create a community of practice however it was encouraged through induction and on-programme activities.

*"We weren't told to make one [community of practice], so created one, we were told that if we have one, we need to make sure that we have a code of conduct in place"*

P9 was the only participant that had a provider established community of practice that he was engaged with, however his participation in this group was varied, P9 states that there should be a code of conduct in place to ensure that the purpose of the group is understood, this is discussed as part of the next sub-theme.

### **3b. Participation in community of practice**

During this stage of the participants' lived experience, with exception to P7, most participants have access to a community of practice within their training provider, however the level of engagement from the participants and their respective peers is varied. P6 discussed her participation by stating that her community of practice is:

*"Really useful because people do ask questions, and some people never engage, and some people only engage if they have a problem, and they will ask a question that is also fine. [For example, on an] independent study day, four people might meet at the library, and we can kind of bounce ideas off each other."*

P11 shares a similar experience with regards to his participation with his community of practice.

*"A beneficial part of my apprenticeship is my peer networks and what I've gained from them, and contacts in business externally as well which this has led to, but basically it's support network with my peers, and it has been really good."*

P11 discussed the added benefit from being part of this community by generating further links within business, he defined it as a support network. P14 has found his community of practice useful in supporting him to make progress, he states that:

*"We're in contact quite regularly [...], when cheaters haven't been present, we use it to kind of just check-in with each other and how we're doing on with the work, which has been really helpful."*

P14's comments suggest there is not a collective understanding of the purpose of a community of practice, especially as he suggests that some of his peers could use it as an opportunity to 'cheat'. Like P11 and P14, P12 benefits from participation within her community of practice:

*"I really relish the opportunity to have a group within the apprenticeship that I am doing. Some People do not join in, and other people in the group do not join in with the conversations very often, only when there is a problem."*

P12 statement suggests that whilst she sees the benefit in participating in the community of practice, it has not provided the full benefits that a purposeful

network of peers would bring. Moreover, P12's community of practice is more of a space purely for problems, and suggested answers, as opposed to sharing good practice and active engagement in discussions. Similarly, P9's participation in a community of practice provides limited benefits, which he demonstrated through his non-verbal cues of discontentment. P9 states that:

*"It's difficult to keep in touch because you tend to post some things based on some of the task's week on week [to the group] and it goes into like an empty box somewhere, and just appears they don't seem to get much feedback from the rest of the group"*

From those that do engage in a community of practice the group convergence is that the participants see the benefit in one, but due to the lack of clarity of the purpose of a community of practice, some participants have not been able to experience the full benefits of one; thus, demonstrating the importance of a training provider detailing a framework in which a community of practice should be formed and function.

#### **Theme 4: Apprenticeship experience**

The participants' lived experience as an apprentice provoked a discussion regarding the accessibility and quality of the support provided by their trainer/assessor. In addition, participants discussed the impact of becoming an apprentice. This dialogue is captured using two themes, 4a. Contact with trainer/assessor, and 4b. Lived experience as an apprentice.

##### **4a. Contact with trainer/assessor**

Communication trainer/assessor was varied in terms of accessibility and quality of support. Despite being supported by her employer, P7 suggests that her trainer/assessor is difficult to contact.

*"So, it was very regular and then regular contact via email. But more recently, she is quite hard to get hold of, her calendar is always busy and now, because I am towards the end, I am putting in a lot of effort and need her help now. So, I am just giving in the projects, it has been quite difficult back and forth, especially online, trying to edit my work and get the feedback. Yes, it has been hard actually."*

P7's comments suggests that at the start of her apprenticeship, the trainer/assessor was proactive in providing her support, however after several months, the trainer/assessor is now less responsive, which is now starting to impact on P7's progress on the apprenticeship. P6's experience is worse than P7, she described her apprenticeship experience to date, as:

*"Yeah, it's been like a travesty." Sometimes people [trainer/assessor] are so busy that it is an extra effort to be teaching someone on the job, you*

*know, and I understand that, and you know, training on a traditional nursing degree and coming to a placement to check my progress [would be a challenge]."*

P6 did however stress that her off-the-job training at the university she was attending was incredibly positive, and the teaching staff there treated her as a professional. P11 states that his trainer/assessor is out of touch with industry, and questions his trainer/assessor's subject knowledge:

*"My experience to date of my trainer is that he is out of touch with what happens within industry, and his subject knowledge is also out of date."*

Like P11, P12 is not satisfied with the level of support provided by her trainer/assessor, and suggests that this has impacted on her confidence, and assignment outcome:

*"Because of the lack of support provided by my trainer, on the latest assignment, it has just knocked me completely for oblivion and my confidence is going backwards because now I know that the level of support that I need and the level of support that they're going to give me isn't comparable."*

Unlike P12's experience, P9 was positive about the level of engagement and support he received from his trainer/assessor:

*"Really positive, the support that I receive from my assessor is extremely positive, and I receive timely feedback"*

Similarly, P14 was keen to stress how positive his experience has been to-date, including the support he receives from his trainer/assessor:

*"I would say, yes, every kind of every facet [is positive]. I would say at work, in the class, the support received from my assessor [is positive] and is personable as well. I think everyone has been supportive. Whichever angle you come from."*

The group convergence is that the support received from a trainer/assessor could be improved, in some cases the issue was with the lack of availability, whereas in others it is the quality of the support the participants received. In a few cases, namely P9 and P14, they are both pleased with the support that they have received to date from their respective trainer/assessor.

#### **4b. Lived experience as an apprentice**

P7's lived experience to date as an apprentice has been positive with her employer, however, she indicates that the level of training she is receiving from her training provider is not meeting her expectation:

*"I was expecting more regarding the classroom atmosphere and support from my training provider, but I suppose in a way it is worked in some ways because it means I can concentrate on my job a lot more and not*



*have to travel. Apart from some issues with the quality of training, the on-the-job side of things is positive, and I have only received positivity from my employer."*

Like P7, P9 remains positive about his experience of being an apprentice, this is despite having to cover classes due to his colleagues' absences.

*"In the environment I work in, it is perfect. I cannot control the absence of the people. If they had not gone absent, I would enjoy it even more than I have been enjoying it, as I would be able to focus more on my apprenticeship."*

As previously discussed P9 has limited access to his 20% off-the-job entitlement due to covering staff absences. P9 appears to just accept this as something that is out of his employer's control. P9 continues to relate back to his experience of being in the Police Force and stresses the point about having to work as a team to ensure that a job gets completed, regardless of the circumstances. Similarly, P11 as previously discussed, also accepts that it is not realistic to always access the 20% off-the-job due to work commitments, and with exception of the quality of the support he receives from his trainer/assessor, his lived experience as an apprentice has supported him to deal with his academic confidence.

*"I felt before I went into it [the apprenticeship], that I was sociably anxious. I have impostor syndrome because I have dyslexia"*

P11 believes that the apprenticeship has given him more confidence in his academic ability and dealing with the feeling of being an imposter when studying at a post graduate level. Like P11, P14's confidence has increased since starting the apprenticeship, he states that:

*"My whole experience has been so positive, my colleagues and my training provider give me a lot of respect, I feel like I am developing as a professional."*

For P6, as previously discussed, she suggests that she is not supported by her employer, and often finds herself having to do her old role, or risk losing the support she needs to achieve her Nursing apprenticeship. P6's describes how some of her colleagues speak to her since becoming an apprentice Nurse:

*"So, for example, yesterday when I was working as a nurse all day, there were sneery comments from a couple of healthcare practitioners, you know like 'you're not with us today,' it's water off a duck's back to me, you know just because I'm working as a nurse, that doesn't mean I'm not helping anyone else"*

Like during phase one, P12's lived experience as an apprentice remains challenging, in addition to having a lack of academic confidence, P12's continues to discuss the lack of support she receives from her employer:

*"My provider said that my employer is showing a lack of appreciation because an apprenticeship is not like a one size fits all. My job does not enable me to get examples and demonstrate my understanding of those apprenticeship criteria. And I think to myself, well, if you have not got the experience, then how are you going to provide an example, I really feel concerned that I am going to fail this apprenticeship."*

Most participants lived experience during month three to six appears to be improving compared to phase one. The divergence within the group is with P12, her lived experience as an apprentice is now having a direct impact on her self-esteem and is also negatively impacting on her job role.

### **Theme 5: Professional status**

Recognising that the participants were already in employment before starting an apprenticeship, they will have previously established their professional identity. This part of the focus group encouraged the participants to discuss what their current identity is since starting an apprenticeship, and whether being an apprentice has impacted on their organisational standing within their respective occupations.

#### **5a. Professional identity**

Participants discussed whether they have multiple identities during their lived experience as an apprentice, for example, whether they identify as a 'worker' and a 'learner.' P7 and P14 only identify themselves as employees and sees the apprenticeship as an intrinsic part of their employment.

P7 states that:

*"I do not think it is changed that much from like just doing a normal job, to be honest. I do not identify as an apprentice; I see myself as an employee doing training."*

P14 provides a similar response:

*"Like, P7, I am so glad that I am studying this apprenticeship, I am going places now. Again like, P7 said earlier, I identify as an employee just like my other colleagues, doing professional development."*

Equally, P9 does not differentiate between his occupation and apprentice identity, he states that:

*"To be honest, I do not differentiate the two and I am quite honest with my students you know, when I first met them [I] was like, yes, I am going to watch you develop from college students into Police Officers. You are going to watch me develop from being a police officer through my apprenticeship into lecturer."*

Conversely, the other participants within the focus group felt the opposite, they believed that they had multiple identities at work. For P6, she often finds herself

having to go back into her previous role as a Healthcare Assistant to cover colleague absences.

*"Yeah, it could not be more different [for me]. [...] so, I am either a healthcare assistant doing all the important but menial jobs, [and at these times] I will be viewed as that, and no one will think of me as training to be a nurse whatsoever, and then I can have a day like yesterday where I worked with a nurse all day. [...], so, I [have] many different identities."*

P11 relates his experience more akin to P6's lived experience:

*"Like P6, you know, I wear many hats. [...] I mean, I have imposter syndrome across all hats as well."*

Clearly for P11, the feeling of being an imposter is something that impacts on him regardless of his identity. Like P11, P12 states that she wears 'multiple hats', but from her comments it suggests that she is becoming overwhelmed with managing her apprenticeship as an existing staff member:

*"So, for me I have to also wear multiple hats, and often get confused which area I should be focusing on."*

Some participants simply identified themselves as an employee and viewed the apprenticeship as professional development. Equally, for others because of their work, and now apprenticeship commitments, they are experiencing multiple identities. P6 was somewhat of a divergence, because she is often having to also identify as her previous role to cover staff absences.

### **5b. Organisational standing**

Following the discussion regarding professional identity, the participants started a dialogue on how being an apprentice has impacted on their organisational standing within their employment. P6 previously discussed negativity she received from her previous colleagues since starting the Nursing apprenticeship, however in terms of her organisational standing she suggests:

*"So, I do not think there is really negativity, and I think when you explain to people properly what you are doing and what you can achieve at the end of it, people say 'Oh my goodness, that is amazing. You still get a salary, and you know you are going to be a nurse' and so in the main, I would say it is positive."*

P6's comments suggest that she has a sense of pride in becoming a Nurse, and others view it as a highly respected role within her occupation. P9's background in Policing, has provided him with more opportunities in his occupation as a Lecturer in Policing. The apprenticeship is providing him with the opportunity to become a qualified lecturer in Higher Education:

*"I think because I was in the Police force, I have lots of experience, and people see me progressing higher within my job as a lecturer."*

Like P6, P9 is confident in his own ability, and his colleagues recognise that he has recent experience of being in the Police Force which they view as a positive. As he previously discussed, his colleagues primarily recognise his vast previous experience in a higher regard than his limited exposure of being a Lecturer. P7, P11, and P14 also suggested that the apprenticeship has improved their organisational standing, they stated the following, respectively:

*"They [employer] want me to succeed so I can progress and improve the prospects of the business."*

*"It is not for everyone, an apprenticeship I mean. However, for me it has only improved my career, there are higher opportunities sent my way now."*

*"I feel validated in my decision to do it. I feel like everything that I am learning so far, I can apply into my job, this is what I expected."*

For phase two, the group convergence was that the apprenticeship was improving the participants' career prospects, and general organisational standing within their occupation. The divergence within this group was P12:

*"I feel like I am losing credibility with my colleagues, because I am falling so far behind with my targets."*

Since phase one, P12 has raised her concern that her targets have not changed since becoming an apprentice, especially as she now is on-the-job for 80% of a working week, therefore she has found it extremely difficult to achieve her targets alongside studying the apprenticeship. P12 is now concerned that her reputation is being negatively impacted within the organisation.

## **Theme 6: Employer knowledge**

To conclude the focus group discussion, the participants discussed the importance of employers' knowledge about apprenticeships. Moreover, that employers should be aware of what is involved in an apprenticeship before encouraging their staff to enrol on one. The main driver of this conversation was concentrated on apprenticeship awareness, this is discussed in the sub-theme below.

### **6a. Apprenticeship awareness**

All participants agreed that employers' awareness of apprenticeships was critical in enabling an organisation to support their employees that become an apprentice. P6 suggests that within her occupation the level of support depends on which Healthcare Trust she works in during her contract of employment:

*"One trust is amazing compared to some of the others in terms of protected learning, whereas others are not so good, there needs to be a strategy across the xxx, to ensure that line managers understand what an apprenticeship is. [...] The more apprenticeships are understood, the better employers become at supporting their staff when they are doing one."*

Similarly, P11 suggests that the overall success of an apprenticeship is determined by the level of support an employer provides:

*"I think it's down to the employer really whether the apprenticeship is going to work for their employees, employers need to understand them better, provide the right support, then I guess there will be mutual respect for apprenticeships, from the employer and employee."*

P9 expected that his employer would not understand apprenticeships, and was prepared for limited access to off-the-job training because of this:

*"OK, that is a nice easy answer from me then, so I went with my eyes open, so thought my employer would not know about them [apprenticeships] well enough to prepare themselves properly and ensure there is a plan B to avoid those on an apprenticeship missing their off-the-job learning. [...] so yes, employers should ensure the right support is in place."*

P9 does acknowledge that employers should be clear on what an apprenticeship is going to entail to ensure that their respective employees are supported. P7 and P14 have to-date experienced working for an employer that does have apprenticeship knowledge, they state the following, respectively:

*"So, it's been quite balanced, I mean my workload, so yeah, it's been alright, my line manager did his research about apprenticeships before letting me do it, I am glad he did."*

*"I'm glad I did it because they're very supportive, my employer understands apprenticeships, so I knew I would be supported"*

P12 was more direct about the importance of employers understanding apprenticeships before letting their staff enrol to one:

*"Employers shouldn't offer apprenticeships to their staff [without apprenticeship knowledge] they need to know what they are about, before putting their staff on one, otherwise no one wins, the apprentice gets stressed, and the employer doesn't understand why targets are not being met."*

The overwhelming group convergence is that employers should be aware of what an apprenticeship is, and the level of commitment that is required from an apprentice, and an employer, to ensure that the apprenticeship benefits both the employee and the business.

## **Phase Two: Qualitative questionnaire**

To verify the findings from the phase two focus group, an anonymised qualitative questionnaire was conducted with the participants. Following the six phases of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), the qualitative responses from the questionnaire were thoroughly analysed this resulted in several initial codes. From examining the data to find coherent and meaningful patterns, these initial codes were then tested across the coded extracts. This resulted in the themes and sub-themes shown in table 14 below:

TABLE 14: PHASE TWO: QUESTIONNAIRE THEMES

<b>Thematical Theme</b>	<b>Sub-theme</b>
1. Change in perception	1a. Positive 1b. Negative 1c. Feeling like being in a fulltime job
2. Impact on occupation	2a. Having a positive impact 2b. Having a negative impact
5. Career optimism	5a. Optimistic 5b. Pessimistic

The findings from these themes are explored further to detail the key features and trends in the data.

### **1. Change of Perception**

The participants were asked to explain how their perception of apprenticeships has changed during month three to six, there were three sub-themes identified from the collective responses.

#### **1a. Positive**

Some participants' perception of apprenticeships has changed and now they are more positive about being an apprentice.

For example, one participant described this as:

*"My perception has changed. I have received loads of support on my apprenticeship, they are now set up so that anyone can do them and benefit from the experience, not just the study but the getting to really know yourself and appreciate the hidden knowledge you already have."*

This participant is benefitting from the support they are receiving and are starting to become more confident in their own ability. Their comment regarding 'hidden knowledge' suggests that they can link the new knowledge to their existing schema. Equally, another response also demonstrates a change in perception, and a positive impact on their learning since phase one:

*"Since week 11 my perception has changed significantly as I started to develop the 'teaching' skills to make the learning experience more inclusive for the students. Particularly with lesson planning, use of action verbs and then moving on to Bloom's taxonomy, very useful and rewarding"*

This response also demonstrates that the participant can now use theory, e.g., Bloom's taxonomy. This participant is linking the off and on-the-job learning effectively to increase their progress on the apprenticeship.

### **1b. Negative**

A few participants negative perceptions are reaffirmed due to their lived experiences during month three to six. One participant stated:

*"I think that my perception of apprenticeships has changed in some ways but not others. I always knew that the apprentice went to college or university and worked but I did not realise the amount of time in the workplace that no learning would take place and the apprentice would be used as another pair of hands at a lower level"*

This comment indicates that there is poor alignment between the off and on-the-job learning. The participant has experience periods where they feel like they are not making progress towards their apprenticeship. Moreover, their comment, 'another pair of hands at a lower level,' reinforces the phase one findings that apprenticeships are aimed at the lower levels and junior positions. Another response suggests the participant's perception has not changed but remains negative:

*"I would say generally no, however I underestimated how hard it would be managing the study and work."*

This response demonstrates the importance of being clear on the commitment required from an apprentice, and their respective employer.

### **1c. Feeling like being in a fulltime job**

One participant comment was that their perception has changed, an indicated that they do not feel like they are on an apprenticeship.

*"Yes, as I am more in a full-time job than education. It may be due to classes being online that you do not get that classroom/education feel like you may have done when it was classroom-based which was what it would've have been if not for covid."*

This response does suggest that the participant would have preferred more participation in the off-the-job learning aspect of being an apprentice.

## **2. Impact on occupation**

Participants were asked how their current perception and lived experiences of being an apprentice is impacting on their occupation.

### **1a. Having a positive impact**

Some of the participants remain positive about being an apprentice, responses suggest that the apprenticeship is having a positive impact on their work, for example:

*"My service and team promote apprenticeships and levy transfer opportunities on a daily basis through jobseeker and SME (Small to Medium sized Enterprises) engagement projects, so I am able to ensure that knowledge of my team is up to date and that apprenticeships' continue to remain a key focus"*

*"My current perception of the apprenticeship positively impacts on my work as I am now able to confidently develop and present a more diverse range of methods to inspire the students (and myself) to captivate and encourage them to buy in to the teaching product"*

These participants' comments suggest that the apprenticeship journey is enabling them to be more effective in their current occupation.

### **1b. Having a negative impact**

Equally, some participants stated that their perception and lived experience as an apprentice has negatively impacted on their work.

*I do not feel there is sufficient time to do the apprenticeship during the 20% off the job, this not only includes the research, the master classes, and the assignment writing. Employers want you to do the work, but they also need you to keep doing your day to day "bread and butter" work. My employer has not adjusted my targets to allow for my apprenticeship.*

*"Sometimes my perception of apprenticeships impacts my work because when I know I am working with someone who has no interest in teaching me, I switch off and revert to the lower-level HCA role instead of trying to learn new skills from the nurse. I used to keep trying to engage with senior members of staff but now I put my head down and try and have the best day I can with the patients"*

*"I have noticed I may be putting a backbench to the studying side and concentrating on more of the job side"*

Like with sub-theme 1b, these comments re-enforce the negative perceptions these participants held during phase one. It also demonstrates the lack of employer understanding and commitment to apprenticeships, especially as in one case, one participant was not able to use their 20% off-the-job effectively, and for the fact that these participants' apprenticeship status is not being recognised.



## **2. Career optimism**

Using the responses from the questionnaire, the following sub-themes were identified to understand how the participants believe they are performing in their role.

### **1a. Optimistic**

Most participants were optimistic about their respective performance at work and achieving the apprenticeship. For example, one participant believes that they are on a trajectory to become a qualified nurse:

*"When I get feedback, it is always positive and senior nurses tell me that I will be an excellent nurse."*

One participant is using the knowledge gained from learning on the job to support their apprenticeship:

*"I use the knowledge I gain from my role to support my apprenticeship; this ensures my apprenticeship is progressing well."*

Another participant is strengthening their relationship with their team at work, it suggests that they are forming a community of practice at work:

*"I have been developing relationships with all the team, sharing my experiences, and capturing theirs to enhance the knowledge and diverse experience. I have volunteered to take on additional lectures to cover long/short term absences. I have sat in others' lectures to capture elements and aid my personal development. This has been reciprocated by more experienced lecturers, which of course to me makes me very proud."*

This response demonstrates that crossing boundaries between communities of practice is possible if the apprentice is within a positive culture of learning.

### **1a. Pessimistic**

The divergence within this group was with one participant who was experiencing difficulties in achieving their targets:

*"I am good at the 'soft' skills such as relationship building, getting my foot in the door with potential new clients, supporting colleagues etc, but the numbers vs targets I put up are often below."*

This comment suggests that whilst the participant is confident in 'soft skills,' e.g., networking, they are concerned that as an apprentice they are not able to achieve their targets.

## Phase Two: Findings (3-6 months)

From cross analysing the findings from the focus group and qualitative questionnaire from phase two, the following trends have been identified, and have been aligned against a positive or negative experience.

Table 15 lists the findings that are most common amongst the participants:

TABLE 15: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, MOST PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCE (3-6 MONTHS)

<b>Most Participants:</b>	
<b>(Positive Experience)</b>	<b>(Negative Experience)</b>
lived experience during month three to six appears to be improving compared to phase one.	group consensus was that most participants were concerned about their respective workloads since becoming an apprentice as an existing member of staff.
apprenticeship was improving the participants' career prospects, and general organisational standing within their occupation.	were either not provided with 20% off-the-job training or were unable to use the time allocated due to their workloads
were optimistic about their respective performance at work and achieving the apprenticeship.	training providers did not create a community of practice from which the participants could share ideas and have a support network with their peers
	have access to a community of practice within their training provider (participant created), however the level of engagement from the participants and their respective peers is varied
	support received from a trainer/assessor could be improved, in some cases the issue was with the lack of availability, whereas in others it is the quality of the support the participants received.

	employers should be aware of what an apprenticeship is, and the level of commitment that is required from an apprentice, and an employer, to ensure that the apprenticeship benefits both the employee and the business.
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Table 16 lists the findings that are shared with some of the participants:

TABLE 16: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, SOME PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCE (3-6 MONTHS)

<b>Some participants</b>	
<b>(Positive Experience)</b>	<b>(Negative Experience)</b>
simply identified themselves as an employee and viewed the apprenticeship as professional development.	
perception of apprenticeships has changed and now they are more positive about being an apprentice.	
apprenticeship journey is enabling them to be more effective in their current occupation.	equally, stated that their perception and lived experience as an apprentice has negatively impacted on their work.

Table 17 lists the findings that are shared with a few of the participants:

Table 17: Summary of Findings, A few Participants' Experience (3-6 months)

<b>A few participants</b>	
<b>(Positive Experience)</b>	<b>(Negative Experience)</b>
were less concerned about workload becoming an issue, especially because they knew their employer was committed to giving them time for off-the-job training.	lived experience as an apprentice is now having a direct impact on their self-esteem and is also negatively impacting on their job role.
had a provider established community of practice that they were engaged with.	because of their work, and now apprenticeship commitments, participants are experiencing multiple identities
were incredibly pleased with the support that they have received to date from their respective trainer/assessor.	are concerned that their reputation is being negatively impacted within the organisation since starting the apprenticeship.
	negative perceptions are reaffirmed due to their lived experiences during month 3-6.
	suggest that they would have preferred more participation in the off-the-job learning aspect of being an apprentice.

In addition to analysing the trends in phase two, Table 18 shows the retention rate of the participants from month three to six on their respective apprenticeship programme.

TABLE 18: MONTH 6 PARTICIPANT RETENTION RATE

<b>Month</b>	<b>sample size</b>	<b>Retention</b>	<b>Explanatory notes</b>
<b>Month 0-2</b>	9 participants	100%	All participants actively enrolled to an apprenticeship
<b>Month 3</b>	7 participants	78%	Two participants withdrew from their apprenticeship programme (P10, P13)
<b>Month 6</b>	6 participants	67%	One participant withdrew due to poor mental health citing excess workload and the apprenticeship as contributing factors (P12)

Participant P12 withdrew from her respective apprenticeship programme during month six. This participant confirmed that this was due to a lack of employer support, highlighting that her employer did not adjust her targets since starting the apprenticeship as one of the main factors. From reviewing P12's data since phase one shows the following:

- a) Starting an apprenticeship due to the fear of being made redundant
- b) Perceptions were shaped by other individuals' experiences and views about apprenticeships
- c) Had limited understanding of apprenticeship policy, and what she was legally entitled to as an apprentice
- d) Have less access to pre-existing communities of practice within her respective job role since becoming an apprentice
- e) Was displeased with the level of support provided by her respective employer mentors
- f) Experienced a feeling of a loss of professional identity since starting an apprenticeship
- g) Low confidence in her own academic ability
- h) Did not have her fulltime equivalent targets changed since starting the apprenticeship
- i) Expressed disappointment of the pedagogical practice provided by her training provider
- j) Did not have a training plan in place, or time allocated for reflection

- k) Encountered issues relating to her performance at work and apprenticeship training

With exception to bullet point 'h,' P12's collective data since month one is aligned to participants P10 and P13 that withdrew from the apprenticeship during phase one. It should be noted that P8 was unable to engage during phase two, this was due to a period of absence from work. P8's lived experience to date shares some commonalities with P12, these will be explored during phase three.

### **Phase Two: Synopsis of Findings**

From analysing the data from phase two, most participants' lived experience during month three to six was improved compared to phase one. This was despite that they were either not provided with 20% off-the-job training or were unable to use allocated time due to their work-related pressures.

Consequentially, most participants were finding that their respective workloads were becoming difficult to manage as an existing staff member, this was due to the level of expectation the participants and their employers had to meet pre-apprenticeship targets. Participant P7 was less concerned about her workload, she attributed this to the positive support provided by her employer. For many of the participants their training providers did not create a community of practice from which the participants could share ideas and have a support network with their peers. Most of the participants did create their own communities of practice with their apprenticeship peers, however due to a lack of collective understanding, the level of their engagement, and that of their peers was varied. Only one participant, P9, had a provider established community of practice that they were engaged with. Furthermore, most participants were unsatisfied with the level of support they received from their trainer/assessor, in some cases the issue was with the lack of availability, whereas in others it was the quality of the support they received. Participants P9 and P14, were the exception; they were pleased with the support that they have received to date from their respective trainer/assessor.

The overwhelming consensus during phase two was the lack of employer awareness of what an apprenticeship is, and the level of commitment that is required from an apprentice, and an employer, participants agreed that a better understanding of apprenticeships would ensure that the apprenticeship benefits both the employee and the business. Despite this, some of the participants' perceptions of apprenticeships had changed, and now are more positive.

Moreover, their apprenticeship journey is now enabling them to be more effective in their occupation. Equally, there were the same number of participants that stated that their perception and lived experience as an apprentice has negatively impacted on their work. P12's lived experience as an apprentice during phase two is having a direct impact on her self-esteem, reputation, and is also negatively impacting on her job role.

Most participants agreed that their apprenticeship was improving their career prospects, and general organisational standing within their occupation. These participants were also optimistic about their respective performance at work and achieving the apprenticeship. With regards to social identity, some participants simply identified themselves as an employee and viewed the apprenticeship as professional development, whereas a few participants were experiencing multiple identities, which they attributed to their work commitments, and lack of trainer appreciation of their experience of industry.

### **Phase Three: Findings**

Following the findings from phase two, the next stage of the research was to explore the lived experiences of the participants over a final reflection point during months six to twelve.

### **Phase Three: Final Reflection (6-12 months)**

Phase three included a semi-structured interview, a focus group, and a qualitative questionnaire. The purpose of this phase was to examine the lived experiences of participants to determine how their perceptions have developed over a longer duration of six-to-twelve-month period, and to establish how being an apprentice as an existing staff member has impacted on their job role, identity, and their progress towards completing their apprenticeship programme.

### ***Phase Three: Semi-structured interview***

The cross-case analysis grouped personal experiential themes that were explicated from the semi-structured data which includes noteworthy non-verbal cues. The grouped experiential themes, and sub themes are listed in table 19:

TABLE 19: PHASE THREE: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW, GROUP EXPERIENTIAL THEMES

Group Experiential Theme	Sub-theme
1. Feeling confident and forming a new identity	1a. Forming a new identity 1b. More confident as a professional
2. Impact on organisational standing	2a. Treated like any other professional 2b. Apprenticeship bias / unconscious bias
3. Being supported through a community of practice	3a. Limited access to community of practice within employer 3b. Continued access to employer community of practice 3c. Continued or improved access to community of practice with training provider 3d. Limited access to community of practice within training provider
4. On and off-the-job training	4a. Lack of on and off-the-job learning 4b. Missed opportunities to learn 4c. Time given and supported
5. Relate the apprenticeship more to my profession	5a. My profession is recognised within my studies 5b. Not personalised to meet the needs of my role
6. No one within my employer encourages me to reflect on my apprenticeship'	6a. Time given to reflect 6b. I do not have time to reflect

### **1. Feeling confident and forming a new identity**

Reflecting on phase one and two, some participants were still unclear on whether the apprenticeship was the right mode of training to meet their current and future aspirations. During phase three, the participants' have experienced at least seven months of being on an apprenticeship, therefore the impact on their identity and self-confidence will be formed.

#### **1a. Forming a new identity**

All the participants' social identity had improved compared to phase one and two. For some there was a significant shift in their identity, whereas for others there was positive progress towards identifying as the role they were training towards within their apprenticeship.

Since phase one P6 has encountered several difficulties from within her workplace and during her off-the-job training. Despite this, P6 elicited throughout her journey a clear sense of direction about what she wanted to achieve on her apprenticeship. In phase two, P6 discussed how she had multiple identities because she was often being pulled back into her old job role, however during phase three her identity as a Nurse was starting to form, she stated that:



*"Compared to when I started, it has become apparent really in the last few weeks [...] I have started to identify as a nurse [...]. It depends where I am, but I do find myself having three identities, a student, an HCA [Healthcare Assistant], and an apprentice nurse."*

Whilst P6 is still finding that she has multiple identities within her occupation, her Nursing apprenticeship is now having a positive impact on her identity as a Nurse. Similarly, P11 was previously a Police Officer before starting his apprenticeship in Lecturing. During the first four months of his apprenticeship, P9 was having difficulties adjusting to being a Lecturer. The apprenticeship has supported him to become a Lecturer of Policing:

*"That has changed, I am now an ex-policeman, but I see myself as a lecturer of policing now, doesn't matter whether I am doing the apprenticeship side of things or not, I am a lecturer in all situations"*

Like P9, P8's apprenticeship focus was also on Lecturing in Higher Education, P8 continues to view herself as a Forensic Psychologist, however during phase three she is starting to feel more like a Lecturer:

*Yes, still, identify first as forensic psychologist. If anyone asked me what I do, I will say forensic psychologist, not lecturer or apprentice [...]. Saying that, I have started to feel more like a lecturer lately because I have been doing so much teaching"*

During phase one and two P11 often referred to having 'imposter syndrome' because of his lack of academic confidence. P11's confidence in his academic ability has increased towards the end of his apprenticeship:

*"Yeah, have proven a lot to myself, I've got the academia side in the bag now."*

P7 and P14 both social identities have improved, they are now more confident in their own ability and are ready to progress. P7 and P14 respectively state:

*"I now just feel like I am an employee doing some training, like anyone else on a course, this works brilliantly for me."*

*"Feeling equipped to take that next step in management and leadership."*

The group convergence was the positive change in social identity, their respective apprenticeship programmes are supporting them formalise an identity that is aligned to their substantial roles that their apprenticeships are aligned to.

### **1b. More confident as a professional**

Most participants have become more confident within their professions since starting their apprenticeship. For example, P9 was especially motivated, and spoke with such enthusiasm about the apprenticeship programme that he was studying:

*"So, from starting off apprehensive about the apprenticeship, I am now excited to attend the next session and learn"*

Unlike P9, P11 during phase one and two was less confident in his academic ability, he has made considerable progress on his apprenticeship:

*"I wasn't like a top-grade student, but way on track to achieve, so yeah feel more academic."*

P9 confirmed that his apprenticeship has supported him to acquire a promotion within his career. Similarly, P14 was trying to 'breakthrough' that ceiling that he was hitting, because of his apprenticeship he is now experiencing new areas of work, and can apply the knowledge gained on the apprenticeship within his occupation:

*"I feel a lot more confident in areas that I've had minimal exposure to previously."*

The group convergence was that during phase three the participants have become more confident in their respective professions and are able to apply knowledge gained from their apprenticeship within their occupation.

## **2. Feeling confident and forming a new identity**

This theme required two sub-themes, a few participants felt that they were treated like other professionals within the organisation, whereas some believed that they experienced being treated different because of being an apprentice.

### **2a. Treated like any other professional**

P7 and P14 have consistently remained positive about their lived experience during their on-the-job training. P7 previously stated in phase two that she felt like an employee doing professional development. During phase three, P7 continues to feel supported and respected by her employer:

*"I thought I'd be treated a bit differently, but I wasn't, my employer treated me like a professional [...], I get respected as much as the others."*

Like P7, P14 has also remained positive about his lived experience during his apprenticeship, P14 now feels more respected by his line manager than he did before starting the apprenticeship:

*"I think my manager has more respect for me now than prior to starting the apprenticeship, so he listens to my ideas."*

P14 states that his manager listens to his ideas, in phase two P14 discussed how his manager gets involved in his apprenticeship, P14 is now able to try out current ideas developed from his apprenticeship within his occupation. P7 and

P14 were the divergence from the group, their experience was that being an apprentice as an existing staff member did not have an impact on their organisational standing, and for P14 it improved his reputation with his line manager compared to before starting the apprenticeship.

### **2b. Apprenticeship bias / unconscious bias**

Some participants experience negativity because of being on an apprenticeship. For P6 she states that:

*"It depends where you work [...] one ward manager is keen on apprenticeships, she gives me all the support that I need [...] another ward manager, who just treats me like an HCA [Healthcare Assistant], she is not interested in the apprenticeship at all"*

P6 has previously discussed her organisational culture towards apprentices, her lived experience from working in Health has been mixed according to what ward she happens to be working in. This suggests there is a lack of an apprenticeship strategy and communication plan in place that supports to improve the workforces' general understanding of apprenticeships, and to ensure that employees are not having to cover aspects of their previous role during their apprenticeship. As identified in phase two, there remains a lack of an apprenticeship strategy within most of the participants' employing organisations, because of this, like P6, participants are encountering either direct apprenticeship bias or unconscious bias. For example, P11 experienced negativity directly from his colleagues for being an apprentice:

*"Some colleagues were being negative about me going back to university again like I was too old to be doing it"*

The comments from P11's colleagues regarding age, again demonstrate that the perception that apprenticeships are for 'young people' still exist within the workplace, in addition, it also suggests that not enough has been done within P11's employer setting to raise awareness of what apprenticeships are for, and who can access them. For P8 and P9, they have a sense of not being able to ask for support, or a sense of duty to cover teaching sessions for others at the detriment of their apprenticeship, P8 and P9 respectively state that:

*"I don't even feel like I can ask my colleagues to cover my class, because they probably won't see that as important"*

*"My manager is supportive, its me that is the problem, I want to support my team"*

P8 and P9 could refuse to cover or teach sessions that overlap with their off-the-job learning, especially as this is a legal requirement. This again further demonstrates the need for an apprenticeship strategy so existing staff members

that become apprentices are not put in a position where they must choose between their apprenticeship and their occupation, instead both elements should complement one another without detriment to either part. Apprenticeship bias from other colleagues was the group convergence, and as a result these participants were having to complete their off-the-job training outside of their contracted hours.

### **3. Being supported through a community of practice**

Considering the results from phase one and two, some participants were able to continue to access existing communities of practice within their occupation, whereas a few participants had limited or no access. In addition, during phase one and two, most participants' training providers did not provide a community of practice, where participants created their own community of practice with their peers, participation was varied. This theme required several sub-themes to express the findings and to determine the level of disparity of the participants' lived experiences.

#### **3a. Limited access to community of practice within employer**

There were a few participants that continued to have limited access to existing communities of practice within their occupation. Like in phase one and two, P6 continues to struggle to be invited into the nursing groups:

*"Nothing has changed in the workplace, still must fight to get involved in training on the wards, and to be part of nursing groups."*

P8 can access existing communities of practice, however this remains limited because she is unable to discuss and share ideas related to her apprenticeship, and instead the focus is on what work her colleagues and P8 do outside of their substantial occupation:

*"So, we don't really talk about the day-to-day work, more about what we do in our roles outside of our job with the employer, as we all do a day a week or so as Psychologists"*

The convergence within this sub-theme was the lack of access to a community of practice that enables the participants to learn from other peers that are qualified within the occupation that P6 and P8 are studying towards.

#### **3b. Continued access to employer community of practice**

With exception to the participants in sub-theme 3a, most participants were able to access existing communities of practice within their occupation. In phase one and two, P7 often referred to being treated with the same level of respect as her other colleagues, this has continued through phase three:

*"I get respected as much as the others and have access to all working and learning groups"*

Similarly, P9 has continued to have access to existing groups and is able to learn from other colleagues, and share his knowledge:

*"Our team culture is different to other teams, I see that around me because I do listen to conversations around in the wider institution and I think our team has a very different culture and a very different mindset, I am always involved in our learning groups and meetings just like everyone else."*

P9 refers to a team culture that exists within his local department, also he indicates that the team that he is part of has a different mindset to other teams from across the institution, this suggests that the positive culture he is experiencing is not necessarily an institutional culture, but one that is local to his department. P11 continues to access his learning groups with his colleagues, however he states that it was difficult because of his workload as an apprentice:

*"I also didn't want to neglect my established learning groups with colleagues, so I made sure that I continued to attend those, although it was difficult due to my workload."*

Unlike P11, P14 has time set aside by his employer to ensure that he can continue to access all available support to make progress on his apprenticeship:

*"This still gives me time to get involved in activities and CPD (Continuing Professional Development) within my role, so I am left out of nothing."*

The convergence within this sub-theme was that participants were able to access existing communities of practice within their occupation, as a result, participants felt valued and respected, and spoke about the positive culture that exists within their local teams. The divergence was P11, he was able to access the existing groups, but he suggests that it was difficult at times because of his workload.

### ***3c. Continued or improved access to community of practice with training provider***

During phase three some participants were now benefiting from the communities of practice within their training provider. P6 is more positive about her experience of being part of a community of practice that she created:

*"The university is much better, I have established a group through WhatsApp, brilliant group, an honestly, everyone's so different, all different backgrounds [...], it's very supportive."*

P11 was the only participant that had a trainer established community of practice, he remains positive about the benefits he has received from this group:

*"My apprenticeship learning group was great, even though we have just about finished we still support one another, so that's been brilliant, we were able to challenge one another, learn from each other and we all shared a common purpose"*

It is clear from P11's comments that the group continues to meet even though the apprenticeship is almost completed. It is also noteworthy that he confirms that it was a space in which they could challenge and learn from one another. P11 clearly values the group, he added:

*"We are still in touch now, we continue to work together to share ideas, and just to check-in from one another, they are an extremely valuable group, one of the best things to come out of the whole course."*

P11's experience of an effective community of practice demonstrates the value and longevity that a productive group brings, he suggests that this network of peers was the best output from his apprenticeship programme. Similarly, P14's experience further demonstrates the value of having an effective community of practice:

*"my learning group are committed to team building and working together as a group of peers. We continue outside of learning to contact one another for support and motivation, I would be lost without it."*

The group convergence is that participants that are part of an effective community of practice are realising the benefits of one, and as a result they have a network of peers from which they can share ideas, challenge new ways of thinking, and learn from each other.

### **3d. Limited access to community of practice with training provider**

The same number of participants as in sub-theme 3c were not benefitting from a community of practice within their respective training provider. For P7 she states:

*"This training provider does not provide opportunities to meet with others, most have their cameras off during sessions. So, like it would have helped as well with some of the situations that I was having, I could have bounced them off someone and it is a shame as well because you spend the best part of a year with others and never speak or even know what they look like"*

P7 recognises the benefits a community of practice would have provided her, she suggests that even after six months on-programme she does not know what her peers look like and is unable to build up a rapport to allow her to develop her network, and to have a group where she can share ideas. Unlike P7, P8's employer did not provide her with the same level of support that P7 received.

Therefore, P8 was not able to access any communities of practice within her training provider because she was timetabled to teach when the group meets:

*"The main issue was that my employer didn't change my teaching timetable, so I wasn't able to attend the live sessions, so had to watch sessions using recordings [...], I wasn't able to meet with other apprentices and get involved in any of the activities"*

For P9, the only community of practice is one that was established by the training provider in the form of a messaging board, P9 suggests that this is not a conducive approach to sharing ideas and learning from one another:

*"My apprenticeship mentor and peers observe me and give me feedback which I reflect on and develop my practice from, there isn't much of a learning group outside of lessons, only an online forum which no one seems to contribute to."*

The group consensus was that the participants appreciate that there is much to be gained from an effective community of practice, however due to the lack of a training provider led approach to providing a framework from which a group can be established, there remains a lack of limited access to an effective network of peers for the purpose of sharing ideas, and a mechanism of support outside of formal learning. P8 was a divergence from the group as she was unable to access the communities of practice within her training provider because of her occupational responsibilities.

#### **4. On and off-the-job training**

In phases one and two, some participants were experiencing difficulties in accessing off-the-job training, and the quality of their on-the-job experience varied. During phase three this wide-ranging experience continued to be a theme, these can be explored through the following sub-themes.

##### **4a. Lack of on and off-the-job learning**

For P6, in phase two, she commented on how valuable her university days were in providing knowledge. However, the other elements of her off-the-job learning were less beneficial, she remains positive with her employer mentor, and trainer/assessor for the fear of receiving less support if she speaks out:

*"I spend most of that meeting really trying to thank everybody for doing the very best they can for me, and I am so grateful for all the 2 days I am given per month and the support I am given [...]. Really, I know that this is sad. I know because I have got so many ideas, but cannot risk speaking out of turn, because they may stop supporting me."*

A common theme for P6 has been a fear that if she speaks out that she could risk not receiving any support from her employer. In addition to the above, P6

added the following to confirm that there is no training plan, and the quality of on and off-the-job is dependent on who she convinces to support her:

*"There is no training plan, all just depends on what you manage to convince others to let you get involved in"*

For P8, she thinks her lack of access to the off-the-job training is because of her employer's limited understanding of apprenticeships:

*"My manager needs to be clear what are apprenticeships, and make sure they are able to explain what they are to those that they want to do one in our team [...] if they want us to do one then they should also give us the time needed to attend sessions, otherwise it seems like a waste of time"*

P8 was quite unhappy regarding this, as with previous phases she continues to be unable to access off-the-job training due to her teaching hours being scheduled at the same time. Despite P9's enthusiasm of his apprenticeship, he is unable to access his 20% off-the-job because of his occupational workload:

*"I put extra hours and I work weekends, you know, do my apprenticeship on a weekend rather than the 20% during the week [...] that's how it is, I don't want a repeat of what's happened last year, every year."*

Similarly, P11 has no access to 20% off-the-job, like P9, P11 links this to his workload:

*"There was no 20% off the job, my workload was too much to enable me to do that [...] my employer will support me with providing me with a discussion, and to pay for the course, but not to take 20% off what I currently do [...] basically my 20% was taken from my family time."*

The overwhelming convergence was the lack of access to the off-the-job entitlement, participants cited workload as the main contributing factor for this. The divergence from the group was P6 who was unable to voice her concern during progress reviews for the fear of reprisals.

#### **4b. Missed opportunities to learn**

A few participants highlighted that because of the lack of a training plan there were multiple missed opportunities to learn on-the-job. For example, P6 states:

*"I can see there are so many learning opportunities that are missed for me to engage in to support me to become a nurse [...] people don't really recognise what we [apprentices] could be doing or how much experience I've got now, or they're just not interested."*

P6's comments further demonstrate the lack of an employer's strategy in ensuring apprentices can access high-quality on and off-the-job learning. P6's



suggests that her colleagues do not recognise how the Nursing apprentices can contribute to provide healthcare. P6's goes further to explain her comment:

*"It is just not standardised enough for me, and I have colleagues on the university course that have a completely different experience to me and that for me is not right [...]. It should not be at your manager's discretion, but it is a trust policy."*

P6 suggests that there is a need for a standardised approach across the institution, she also highlights that the quality of the apprentices' experience is dependent upon who their line manager is. This sub-theme demonstrates that there remains a lack of awareness within industry regarding apprenticeships, and a general under appreciation of apprentices in terms of the contribution they can bring to an organisation. Finally, it further supports the importance of having a clear training plan in place to ensure apprentices receive a high-quality on and off-the-job learning experience.

#### **4c. Time given and supported**

A few participants, namely P7 and P14 have both consistently commented on how their employers have provided them with support on their apprenticeships. During phase three, P7 states:

*"They do give me the time I need, and are very flexible, they are always encouraging me to make links between my job and my apprenticeship"*

This contrasted with the participants in sub-theme 4b, similarly P14 states:

*"Well, my manager is very supportive of the 20% off the job, and tells me to take whatever time outside of that to support me to make progress with my apprenticeship"*

P7 and P14 were both encouraged to link their new knowledge and skills developed during their off-the-job learning to their respective occupations. Both of their employers worked with them to identify opportunities to develop their knowledge, skills, and behaviours linked to the occupational standard that their apprenticeship was working towards covering.

### **5. Relate the apprenticeship more to my profession**

In phase two some participants identified that their profession was not being recognised within their studies, this continued to be a theme in phase three, with exception to P6 and P14. Therefore, this theme required two sub-themes, these are discussed below.

#### **5a. My profession is recognised within my studies**

P6's lived experience has been difficult due to issues relating to her on-the-job learning and being able to access her 20% off-the-job learning entitlement. P6

has previously spoken about how positive her university experience has been, and for phase three this continues to be a positive theme for her:

*"I feel with all my lecturers really, I have a good relationship, we speak to each other as professionals [...] I keep my head down, Teacher to Student relationship. You know I am a student, and I will stay quiet, and I will listen to you. And you are always right. And you know that [...]. I do not want to rock the boat, I need to keep them onside too, otherwise they may stop seeing me as a professional and make things more difficult."*

P6 acknowledges that she is treated as a professional within her higher education classes that she attends as part of her Nursing apprenticeship, however, there remains a sense of fear of losing the support she receives. This was originally isolated to her on-the-job experience, but now has moved over to her off-the-job university days too. Like P6, P14's off-the-job learning includes several classes in a university, he continues to be positive about his lived experience, and suggests that his profession is being recognised within his studies:

*"Yes, and in class so we will be talking about a topic and then someone will say this is what I am facing in my place of work at the minute and then we just go off into a big discussion about it. So, we are given that room to discuss and disagree with each other on different things and different approaches, but yes, our professions are always included throughout the delivery."*

The consensus within this sub-theme is that a few participants' professions are being considered within the delivery of the course content during sessions at their respective training providers. P6 continues to have a sense a fear that she may lose the support that she receives if she speaks out against any aspect of her training, whereas for P14, he remains positive about all aspects of his training.

#### **5b. Not personalised to meet the needs of my role**

Contrastingly to sub-theme 5a, most participants felt that their training providers were not doing enough to differentiate the taught knowledge to the participants' professions. P7's lived experience of their training provider was that they were slow at providing feedback, and because her trainer/assessor has not visited P7 at her place of work, the training materials are not tailored to meet P7's occupational responsibilities:

*"They take too long to get back to me, so by the time the course tutor does, that piece of work is completed at work, so it does not feel as relevant anymore. The tutor has never visited me at my employer, and does not stay connected, it has been months since I have spoken with her, so that part is not working the way it should" [...]*

*"it'd be interesting for my course tutor to actually come in and see how I work and where I'm working and stuff like that, I think it would be good to join up the job and the apprenticeship"*

Similarly, for P8 her experience is that the training provider makes no attempt to link the knowledge to her subject discipline which makes it more of a challenge for P8 to apply the knowledge she has developed during her off-the-job learning:

*"I think they [training provider] should relate the apprenticeship more to my profession instead of lumping all the material together"*

Like P8, P9 is also training as a Higher Education Lecturer, he has also identified the lack of differentiated course content:

*"Some of the course tutors are great, some are not, they need more consistency in the quality of teaching, but I have learnt new things, it would have been great if they could have related to our disciplines more."*

Like P7, P11's trainer/assessor does not understand P11's occupational context due to the lack of on-site visits, in addition, P11 suggests that his trainer/assessor did not know enough about the subject being delivered:

*"Basically he [trainer] didn't know enough about his subject, and only visited me once within my place of work so I don't think he understood the context well enough, he has now left the university anyway"*

The group convergence was that training providers do not differentiate the course materials to make more alignment with the participants' professions, in addition, because of a lack of on-site visits to the participants' place of work, the trainer/assessors were unable to appreciate the context in which the participants were working in.

## **6. No one within my employer encourages me to reflect on my apprenticeship**

The participants were prompted to discuss how they are encouraged to reflect on the knowledge, skills, and behaviours developed during their apprenticeships. This is to identify to what extent their experience aligns to experiential learning. There were two sub-themes identified based on the group convergence and divergence.

### **6a. I do not have time to reflect**

Most participants were not encouraged either by their employer mentor or their trainer/assessor to reflect on their learning during the apprenticeship. P6 was previously a teacher before working in healthcare, she recognises the

importance of reflection, however she has not been given a structured approach to do so:

*"I don't get time to reflect so more opportunities to reflect would be good [...], getting case studies of patients and really, you know, going into the detail and what would you do here and what does that mean and why, this would be a great way for me to develop my practice and develop new ideas"*

For P8 and P9, their respective comments demonstrate a lack of emphasis placed on reflection by their employers and training providers:

*"No one within my employer speaks to me or encourages me to reflect on my apprenticeship, and honestly, I don't have the time to reflect."*

*"My employer doesn't, that is just through my apprenticeships, my colleagues and manager don't get involved, they just let me get on with it."*

For P11, he is encouraged to reflect on his apprenticeship by his employer but due to his workload he was not able to prioritise this:

*"my employer did encourage me to reflect and suggested that it would be good for me to develop an operational measure that should use the theory I learnt on the apprenticeship to apply within the workplace, I would not normally have the time, but as it was so work related, I was able to do it on this occasion. It was so beneficial being able to reflect on something linked to both the job and the apprenticeship."*

P11's comments do suggest that once he did reflect, he could see the benefit of it, his comments suggests that due to the lack of a training plan, reflection is seen more of an add-on than a core part of learning. The group convergence is reflection is not given the focus required within a training plan, and the participants have not been encouraged to reflect on their learning or asked how they could apply their new knowledge during their on-the-job duties.

### **6b. Time given to reflect**

The divergence within the overarching theme was with P7 and P14, their respective employers actively encourage them to reflect on their learning, and to try out innovative ideas within their occupation. P6 states:

*"[My employer] were doing one to ones with me just to encourage me to think about my apprenticeship training and to try out new things on my job [...]. Their feedback has supported me to improve my achievements on my apprenticeship and in my job"*

P6's comments also suggest that she receives feedback from her employer, which is something she previously highlighted as being a negative within her training provider. P6 can compare her positive experience within her occupation

to measure the quality of training that she receives from her training provider, which to date has not met her expectations. For P14, he does not relate his discussion to reflection directly, but provides a response which suggests that reflection is innately occurring during conversations with his employer mentor:

*"Yes and no. So not in that kind of way. So, we will be talking about different things that we have got going on as a team and then I will relate that back to the apprenticeship and then I will say to him these ties in with what we are doing at the minute and link it in that way."*

P14's employer mentor encourages him to link what he is doing on-the-job with his off-the-job learning, despite that P14 takes more of a lead of this linking, this enables P14's to adapt new knowledge and to develop on his learning when conducting his job role. P7 and P14 both have had a positive on-the-job experience, this sub-theme demonstrates the importance of employer involvement to understand what they need to do as an organisation to support their employee, but also provides an opportunity to encourage their employees to reflect on their apprenticeship, and to make links with what is happening within the organisation that benefits the business as well as the employee in meeting the knowledge, skills, and behaviours of an occupational standard.

### ***Phase Three: Focus Group***

At this stage, the participants' apprenticeship journey is within nine to twelve months, thus they can reflect upon their time of becoming an apprentice as an established member of staff. This section focuses on the results of the focus group using Braun and Clarke (2006) approach to thematic analysis.

Consequentially, the following initial codes were identified and then verified across the coded extracts for the focus group. This resulted in the themes and sub-themes in table 20. It should be noted that participant P8 has taken a break in learning, therefore will no longer be participating in this study. P8 confirmed that this was because of workload and personal commitments. In addition, participants P6 and P11 were unavailable to take part in the focus group due to other commitments, however they both remain on-programme and on-track with completing their apprenticeship.

TABLE 20: PHASE THREE: FOCUS GROUP

Thematical Theme	Sub-theme
1. Social identity	1a. Organisational standing 1b. Improvement in confidence
2. Lived experience	2a. Colleague interactions 2b. Community of practice with peers 2c. Employer support
3. Change in perception	3a. Change in perception over time

### **Theme 1: Social Identity**

The participants were asked to reflect on their experience as an existing staff member that became an apprentice, and to describe the impact this has had on their organisational standing and identity. This resulted in two sub-themes, these are discussed below.

#### **1a. Organisational standing**

From the group discussions, participants were able to compare their lived experiences with each other, and how they viewed themselves during the apprenticeship. For P14 his experience was incredibly positive, he previously stated that his reputation had improved because of his apprenticeship journey. P14's organisational standing has influenced how he views his apprenticeship:

*"I am very much feeling like I always say that when I go to my university days I am going to work. It is just another day of work where I am representing the business."*

Similarly, for P7 she has continuously commended the support that she has received from her employer, her positive organisational standing has influenced how she views her apprenticeship:

*"I don't feel like an apprentice, I see myself as a professional, and the apprenticeship is kind of a training day"*

P9's organisational standing has developed over the duration of his apprenticeship; he experienced multiple identities since changing careers from a Police Officer to a Lecturer in Policing. His apprenticeship journey has provided him with a scaffold from which he could develop from:

*"At the beginning I would have said that I had multiple identities, police officer, lecturer, apprentice, but now I see myself as a lecturer"*

The group convergence was that the apprenticeship has supported the participants to develop their social identities and has improved their organisational standing within their occupations.

### **1b. Improvement in confidence**

The participants reflected on their apprenticeship journey, and all participants agreed that the apprenticeship has improved their self-confidence, P14 states:

*"The biggest impact on me is my confidence has improved, I feel empowered to progress within my career"*

P14's feeling of empowerment suggests that the apprenticeship is fulfilling his original phase one ambition for which was, to use the apprenticeship as an approach to progress into management. P7 equally shares this view, she states:

*"That's what I would say as well. I am using a different side of my brain that I may have not used before, and it is really like brought out a bigger confidence in me, and in my abilities, and what I can do"*

The feeling of an increase in self-confidence as well as empowerment was also prevalent for P9:

*"I came in with a load of motivation, very optimistic and all I have done since I have started is gain increased knowledge. I now know things that I did not know before, and the apprenticeship has provided this to me. That is why my professional identity has changed because I am thinking like a teacher."*

The group agreed that their respective apprenticeship programme has improved their self-confidence, and as a result, the participants have a sense of empowerment to progress within their careers.

## **Theme 2: Lived experience**

Collectively, the participants engaged in discussion that explored their interactions with their colleagues since becoming an apprentice. The participants reflected on their communities of practice with their peers, and the support they received from their employer. This theme was examined using three sub-themes, these are discussed below.

### **2a. Colleague interactions**

All participants experienced only positivity from their colleagues, however it should be noted that the participants involved within the focus group all repeatedly commended their colleagues since phase one. P9, P14, and P7 respective comments demonstrate this level of positivity:

*"Only had positivity from my colleagues and my peers, so no issues at all"*

*"No, I've not experienced anything like that, only positivity"*

*"My employer has treated me so well; I just feel like one of the team"*

The comments suggest that all the participants within this focus group have a positive team culture within their occupation, which has impacted on the level of support they have received from their colleagues.

### **2b. Community of practice with peers**

Participants reflected on the communities of practice that they were part of within the training provider. P7 suggests that there was no community of practice established within her training provider, and therefore she did not develop a network of peers:

*"It was all online, there was never any talking outside the actual class, and I have never spoke to any of them again since we finished the classes and some of them, I do not even know what they look like because we always had our cameras off. So, that is like distant memory to me now."*

P9 shared a similar experience, he states:

*"It was on teams, but it was more for sharing tasks related to assignments than a support group, not even face to face on teams. Nothing like P14's experience, absolutely-not."*

P9 refers to the experience that P14 previously discussed regarding the effectiveness of the community of practice he was part of. P14 reiterates how effective he found being part of this community of practice:

*"Everyone really roots for each other, and everyone really supports each other. We have not got any lectures this month. So, we are talking about meeting up anyway and keeping that touch point for sharing ideas about the course."*

The convergence was with P7 and P9 who did not have an established community of practice where they could share ideas, and work towards a common goal. Whereas, for P14, who was the divergence in this sub-theme, his experience was extremely beneficial to him, and demonstrates how effective a community of practice can be.

### **2c. Employer support**

All participants agreed that their respective employers provided them with support throughout their apprenticeship journey. For P14 he commends his employer for the support that has been provided to him:

*"Yeah, I feel very well supported and I can take whatever time I need to study, and I am encouraged to manage my own diary. And I have been*



*encouraged to seek out opportunities to shadow other departments and other colleagues, to help me on my apprenticeship using other activities outside of my job, as well to enhance my professional development."*

P14 was encouraged to look across the organisation to identify other opportunities to develop his knowledge, skills, and behaviours beyond his own department. This is particularly good practice and aligns well to a whole organisation approach to learning. P9 was given support by his employers, however P9 was not able to use his 20% off-the-job entitlement due to covering absences, and taking on more work:

*"Yeah, my employer has supported me, they have offered me to take 20% off-the-job, and yes, I have had the opportunity to have it, but it would be at the expense of other things. So, like I said before, a lot of my apprenticeship works done either in the evenings or weekends. I have some first-class colleagues, and employer mentor, all very supportive. I am just overwhelmed with the amount of support I have experienced all over within the organisation."*

P7's experience was her employer provided her with flexibility to enable her to fully engage with her apprenticeship programme.

*"My employer is very flexible with me, they are relaxed as well, so it is a case of get on with it and ask us questions, we want you to succeed with this. But again, I do not mind that because it is the way I roll anyway. I like to just get on with my work."*

The group convergence is that all participants were pleased with the level of support that they received from their employers. The divergence was P9's experience, in which he remained positive about the support he received from his employer, despite not being able to use his 20% off-the-job entitlement due to taking on additional work to cover staff absences.

### **Theme 3: Change in perception**

Participants were asked to reflect on how their original perceptions of apprenticeships have changed over the duration of their apprenticeship, this is discussed in the sub-theme below.

#### **3a. Change in perception over time**

P14 works within an apprenticeship team, his perception of apprenticeships has been influenced by his participation in one:

*"I think what it has enabled me to appreciate more is that apprenticeships are for a wide variety of people across all levels and sectors."*

P14 now realises that apprenticeships provide a pathway to upskill for all individuals regardless of their age. Similarly, P7 thought apprenticeships were

for 'young people' and courses that focus on trades; however, her perception has now changed:

*"But obviously now having done it for over a year, I have realised that it is all different ages, all different walks of life and there is more educational learning than what I thought before. I did not realise there was so much more learning involved, it is not just the on-the-job stuff."*

P9's previous perception of apprenticeships was shaped from his experience of them before the apprenticeship reforms, he now views apprenticeships as an option for all age groups, levels, and sectors:

*"My perception of an apprentice was it was for young people, low paid, trades, but that was because I grew up in the 80s and they were that before? I think like P7 and P9, they are for anyone who wants to learn, they are at different levels, and sectors."*

The group all agreed that their experience of apprenticeships has positively impacted on their perceptions of them. They all acknowledge that apprenticeships can be used across diverse levels, subject areas, and that there is no age cap for individuals that enrol to one.

**Phase Three: Qualitative questionnaire**

To verify the findings from the phase three semi-structured interview and focus group, an anonymised qualitative questionnaire was conducted with the remaining five participants, namely P6, P7, P9, P11 and P14. Following the six phases of thematical analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), the qualitative responses from the questionnaire were thoroughly analysed this resulted in several initial codes. From examining the data to find coherent and meaningful patterns, these initial codes were then tested across the coded extracts. This resulted in the themes and sub-themes shown in table 21 below:

TABLE 21: PHASE THREE: QUALITATIVE QUESTIONNAIRE

Thematical Theme	Sub-theme
1. Changes in perceptions	1a. Improved perception 1b. Nuanced change in perception
2. Impact on work	2a. Positive impact 2b. Negative impact
3. Impact on identity	3a. Positive change
4. Support from employer	4a. Positive support
5. Support from trainer/assessor	5a. Supported progress 5b. Requires improvement

The findings from these themes are explored further to detail the key features and trends in the data.

## **Theme 1: Change in perceptions**

The questionnaire elicits responses from the participants that describes how their current perception differs from before starting an apprenticeship programme, this is expressed through the two sub-themes below.

### **1a. Improved perception**

Some of the participants' perceptions of apprenticeships had improved over the duration of twelve months; one participant commented:

*"Really positive and a lot more aligned to my previous academic experience at a university previously"*

Following a similar theme another participant found that their apprenticeship experience has made it easier for them to transition into academia:

*"It doesn't matter to me what it is called, it is valuable and has made the transition into academia far more fluid and informative."*

Considering the phase one findings which showed that the participants originally viewed an apprenticeship as non-academic, this comment suggests that the participant's previous academic involvement has aligned to what they have experienced on the apprenticeship. Another comment demonstrates that a participant's preconception that an apprenticeship is for 'young people' has been changed:

*"I have also come to the realisation that an apprenticeship is not just for 17/18-year-olds and in fact a lot more older people are now doing them."*

It is apparent that the perceptions of some participants have improved over a twelve-month period, these participants now recognise that an apprenticeship can be for higher educational study, different age groups, and a good approach to transition into higher education whilst working on-the-job.

### **1a. Nuanced change in perception**

A few participants perceptions are less clear, and instead provide layers of how their perceptions have been shaped by their lived experiences. For example, one participant's comment states:

*"The support I have received from the apprenticeship team at the hospital has been much more comprehensive than I thought it would be. Working as an apprentice is like my perceptions at the start and depends on who I am working with."*

This suggests that their lived experience as an apprentice is different according to who they work within employment, and it is this experience that either re-enforces their original perception or challenges it. Another comment suggests

that their lived experience has confirmed what their original perception of apprenticeships was during phase one:

*"Much harder work than I thought - and I expected it to be hard!"*

The responses within this sub-theme demonstrate how the lived experiences of the participants influence their current opinion of what an apprenticeship is, and who they are for. It is also clear that a few participants are influenced by how their experience of being apprentice is regarded by the colleagues they work with.

## **Theme 2: Change in perceptions**

Participants were asked to reflect on how the apprenticeship has impacted on their occupation, this required two sub-themes to explore the findings.

### **2a. Positive impact**

A few participants suggest that the apprenticeship had a positive impact on their occupation, one comment states:

*"Yes, especially during busy periods, where taking 2 days out for recall wasn't ideal timing, but the learning has impacted my work, and my approach to work, positively."*

Equally, another comment also suggests that the apprenticeship has had a positive impact on their occupation:

*"Yes, it has provided me with a different and more informative lens in which to focus on the what, the how, the why and when."*

This comment demonstrates how the apprenticeship has encouraged the participant to become more critical in their way of thinking, which has benefitted their job role.

### **2b. Negative impact**

Some of the participants' responses highlight how being an apprentice as an existing staff member has had a negative impact on their work-life balance:

*"Yes, I did the majority of my work in my own time and the 20% off the job was non-existent"*

Limited or no access to the 20% off-the-job entitlement has been a common theme throughout this study, another participant makes a similar comment regarding having the time required to complete their duties:

*"It did not at first but now I have been given much more responsibility in some cases, I felt I was not able to give more of the time needed to my work-based projects."*

A final comment suggests that the participant was required to work in their previous role despite having a new role as a Nursing apprentice, this has caused them to encounter difficulties in managing workload, and their organisational standing:

*"Yes. I am trying to learn to be a nurse at the same time as being a Healthcare Assistant. It is difficult to be both unless I am supernumerary and not counted in the day's numbers."*

Collectively, these responses demonstrate the need for employers to have a clear organisational strategy to support their staff to access their entitlement of 20% off-the-job, and to manage their respective workloads.

### **Theme 3: Impact on identity**

Participants were asked to reflect on how the apprenticeship has impacted on their identity during work.

#### **3a. Positive impact**

Most participants agreed that the apprenticeship has had a positive impact on their social identity. One participant is now confident in using their developed behaviours and attitudes to support their work.

*"I'm definitely starting to put some of the behaviours and attitudes into my work life."*

Another participant now views themselves as an advocate for apprenticeships, and as having a proven academic ability because of completing the apprenticeship.

*"I see myself as an advocate for apprenticeships and the apprenticeship levy, I also see myself as having proven my academic ability somewhat"*

Other comments suggest that the participants have developed their social identity, for example one participant is forming an identity of an Academic Lecturer:

*"I am transitioning into an academic lecturer, its a great journey where I am feeling valued and supported."*

Similarly, another participant has improved their self-confidence in terms of new knowledge and abilities.

*"I think it has given me a lot more confidence. I had not studied in a while and not had used my brain in ways I have been using it due to the*

*apprenticeship, and this has given me a lot more confidence in my abilities and knowledge gained."*

The group convergence was that the apprenticeship has improved most of the participants' social identity within their occupation, this includes an increase in self-confidence, and a transition of identity towards the occupational job role the respective apprenticeships are aligned to. The divergence was with one participant who stated that:

*"I see myself as being able to work at a much higher level than I currently am. Sometimes I am frustrated by this, and it leads to feelings of 'shall I throw the towel in and go back to management'"*

This comment suggests that the participant has felt undervalued during their apprenticeship journey, and at times has considered to withdraw because of this.

#### **Theme 4: Support from employer**

Participants were asked to reflect on how their employer has supported them throughout their apprenticeship, this resulted in one sub-theme.

##### **4a. Positive support**

Most participants agreed that their respective employers supported them throughout their apprenticeship. For one participant they described this as:

*"I am supported far and wide. I have a work-based mentor, academic mentor, and employer mentor. All of which have had a hand in guiding me through the first few months of my new career."*

This participant was clearly provided with a lot of support and recognises how this has supported them into a new career within their organisation through the apprenticeship. Another participant stated that:

*"She is brilliant. Supportive and proactive. She listens to concerns, pushes me to learn and keeps me going when times are tough. I have laughed and cried with her and know that she will always be my advocate and role model."*

This participant created a connection with their employer mentor, and as a result has a safe space in which they can discuss their emotions. Similarly, the following responses suggest the same level of support for other participants:

*"I am quite comfortable with my employers and mentor, so I have been able to easily discuss work stuff and feel relaxed to do so."*

*"So far my employer mentor has provided reassurance that I'm doing okay, that I'm on the right lines and that I am where I should be."*

The group convergence is that for the remaining participants, their employers have provided them with pastoral and on-course support throughout their apprenticeship. The divergence was with one participant that stated:

*"They were in essence a sounding board"*

This suggests that the employer support was limited compared to the other participants that responded to the questionnaire, however nevertheless, the participant at least views them as an individual that they can share ideas with.

### **Theme 5: Support from trainer/assessor**

Some participants stated that their trainer/assessor supported them through their apprenticeship journey, whereas a few suggested that the support that they received did not meet their expectations, consequentially this resulted in two sub-themes, as discussed below.

#### **5a. Supported progress**

Some participants agreed that the pedagogical support that they received from their respective trainer/assessor met their level of expectation, one participant commented with:

*"I had quarterly catch ups with the academic mentor, drop-in sessions with module tutors, informal catch ups before lessons and providing the ability to book meetings whenever we feel necessary."*

This response suggests that the participant had regular meetings with their trainer/assessor and felt able to book further meetings as required. Similarly, other participants stated that:

*"I had meetings with my trainer for my weekly classes, and I then had a one to one with my trainer that would help me with my projects and any problems I have had. The trainer for our lessons was good, he was clear on what he was teaching and if we had any issues or did not understand we were able to email."*

*"Very friendly, informative and is in regular contact."*

These comments demonstrate that some participants that remained on their apprenticeship during month twelve were able to continue to access valuable support from their trainer/assessor.

### **5b. Requires improvement**

A few participants' comments suggest that the support that they received from their trainer/assessor was below the participants' level of expectation. For one participant they suggested that:

*"The university lecturers vary in their support, and it ranges from useless to brilliant. I have never personally sought academic support and just get on with what I need to do."*

This comment suggests that the participant is an independent learner, however, it also suggests that due to the varying quality of the support that they receive, they do not utilise the support and guidance of their trainer/assessor, as this is dependent on whom the participant believes will provide them with effective pedagogical support during their apprenticeship. Another participant commented that:

*"They could have been more detailed in the 'how to' aspect of the course, not simply academic theories, and discussions"*

This response suggests that the participant wants more skills being practice and further discussions about how to apply the knowledge. The convergence for this sub-theme is that a few participants were dissatisfied with the level of pedagogical support from their respective training provider.

### **Phase Three: Addendum semi-structured interview**

An addendum semi-structured interview was requested by P7 after the formal research was concluded, this was because of a notable change in her lived experience as an apprentice, regarding issues she was encountering with her training provider. Following approval from the University's Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, an extra-ordinary semi-structured interview was conducted with P7 to examine her current lived experience. Following the method outlined in the methodology, this semi-structured interview was analysed using Smith and Nizza's (2021) approach to interpretative phenomenological analysis, but only through to formulating experiential statements, due to having a single participant. This resulted in the experiential statements shown in table 22 below:



TABLE 22: PHASE THREE: ADDENDUM SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW, P7

Experiential Statements
1. Not getting feedback in a timely manner
2. Feeling of withdrawing from the apprenticeship
3. Causing illness
4. Poor initial assessment of needs
5. Employer remains supportive

The experiential statements identified from the semi-structured interview conducted with P7 are discussed below.

**Statement 1: Not getting feedback in a timely manner**

P7 was due to complete her Digital apprenticeship in September 2022, P7 submitted all remaining assessments to her trainer/assessor several weeks prior to this. P7 has repeatedly contacted her trainer/assessor but has not received any response since submitting her final assessment. This is causing P7 anxiety and frustration because of having to wait.

*"I am still working at xxxx, still doing this apprenticeship that really should've finished back in September or earlier if I had not been messed around so much."*

P7 has consistently reported her level of dissatisfaction with her training provider, especially because of the lack of communication P7 has experienced when communicating with her trainer/assessor. During the interview, P7 was clearly unhappy, and angered by the situation that she has found herself in:

*"My apprenticeship trainer has messed me around, lied about marking stuff in emails when I outright asked, only to tell me on a call she had not. Given countless excuses and almost said the reason for not doing certain things was that she did not want to stress me out."*

From P7's response it is evident that there is a breakdown in the apprentice and trainer relationship, P7's comments suggests that she no longer trusts what her trainer is saying with regards to P7's marked work. This is causing P7 to consider withdrawing from her apprenticeship programme. Collectively, this experiential statement suggests that there is no agreed timeframe provided by the training provider to state when apprentices can expect to receive their feedback by.

**Statement 2: Feeling of withdrawing from the apprenticeship**

Due to the situation discussed in statement 1, P7 is now considering withdrawing from her apprenticeship programme:

*"I am at a level now where I may leave, and it is so close to the end too. It has shown me that although apprenticeships are a good thing in that it has put me on the ladder of digital marketing, and now to look at my CV, you could say I have over a year's experience in digital marketing."*

P7 acknowledges that the apprenticeship has supported her to move roles into a digital marketing position, especially because of her experience on-the-job. P7 was emotional when discussing this point because she has had a positive experience with her employer, and because of this has made considerable progress with her apprenticeship programme. P7 is less enthusiastic about her training provider:

*"So, I am waiting on her [trainer/assessor] to mark my projects, still, so I can be put through [to the end-point assessment]. This whole experience has really disillusioned me with the whole apprenticeship thing."*

This comment suggests that because P7's experience with her trainer/assessor, it has influenced her to have a negative perception of apprenticeships, from a positive starting point as documented in phase three. This demonstrates how a negative lived experience of any aspect of an apprenticeship can influence a change of perception, in addition it also re-enforces the importance of having a training provider commitment statement in place that manages the expectations of the apprentice and employer.

### **Statement 3: Causing illness**

Because of the P7's recent experience, it has caused her to become ill with stress, she states:

*"The stress I have been under over the past month due to my apprenticeship has led me to think I may just drop out. It really does show that if you have a bad trainer, it can ruin the whole thing."*

P7 relates the stress that she has been under due to having a bad trainer, before this encounter, P7 was previously very motivated about the apprenticeship, and indeed had made noteworthy progress towards completing it. P7 further states that:

*"It is causing me so much stress that I am becoming ill because of it. I should not have to go through this with them."*

This documented experience shows the importance of having an effective trainer provider because of the repercussions on apprentices' well-being from having to deal with a lack of support and feedback.

#### **Statement 4: Poor initial assessment of needs**

The statement from the semi-structured interview suggests that there was no initial assessment of P7's learning needs, P7 commented that:

*"I also never got my maths in school. I got a D. But I managed to go to college and university and yet I am now being made to do it for this and cannot pass unless I pass my exam."*

P7 did not achieve a GCSE maths grade of C/4 or above previously, a requirement of the advanced apprenticeship that P7 is studying towards, requires that a level 2 or GCSE grade C/4 be achieved before an apprentice can progress through to the end-point assessment. P7 was unaware of this, and the training provider did not identify this through an initial assessment before P7 started the apprenticeship. This has further increased P7's anxiety:

*"So now, on top of everything else, I have had to do two-hour lessons each week as well as in my own time and revise from past papers. I have failed the exam twice. I am not an exam person; I never have been. I have dyslexia and dyscalculia, so exams are not beneficial to how I work. Yet something like this is holding me back also. I have found the whole thing very frustrating. And it really has affected me"*

This statement further demonstrates the consequence of a lack of an initial assessment because the training provider had not identified that P7's has both dyslexia and dyscalculia, therefore P7's did not receive any additional learning support whilst being an apprentice, including mathematics. Furthermore, P7 added that:

*"It is just a shame to be let down by the training provider like this, I have worked so hard, however once again they have made me feel just like a number rather than a person, they didn't consider my profession during the training, and it looks like that they didn't consider my learning difficulties either."*

Collectively, P7's experience demonstrates the importance of conducting a thorough initial assessment with apprentices before they embark on an apprenticeship. In addition, this experience strengthens the case for regular progress reviews on at least an eight-weekly basis, that not only checks progress towards completing an apprenticeship, but also revalidates whether the initial commitments agreed to by the apprentice, employer, and training provider are being upheld, and continue to be suitable in providing the holistic support the apprentice requires to achieve the apprenticeship.

### **Statement 5: Employer remains supportive**

P7 has consistently commended the support that her employer has provided her, despite this recent experience with her training provider, P7 still remains positive about her employer:

*"My managers are pushing forward anyway and putting me into normal employment in December, they are very unimpressed with the training provider, but their concern is that I have the skills to the job, which I now have"*

This comment shows the importance of having an employer that has knowledge of apprenticeships, therefore in P7's case, their employer appreciates that P7 has the skills required to continue in a substantial role as a digital marketer. In other disciplines, the knowledge, skills, and behaviours would not be adequate to continue through to a substantial role in the occupation the apprenticeship is aligned against, for example in Nursing.

### **Phase Three: Findings (6-12 months)**

From cross analysing the findings from the semi-structured interviews, focus group, qualitative questionnaire, and the addendum semi-structured interview with P7 from phase three, the following trends have been identified, and have been aligned against a positive or negative experience.

Table 23 lists the findings that are most common amongst the participants:

TABLE 23: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, MOST PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCE (6-12 MONTHS)

<b>Most Participants:</b>	
<b>(Positive Experience)</b>	<b>(Negative Experience)</b>
experienced a positive change in their social identity and were formalising an identity that is associated to their substantial roles that their apprenticeship was aligned to	felt that their training providers were not doing enough to differentiate the taught knowledge to the participants' professions
became more confident in their respective professions and can apply knowledge gained from their apprenticeship within their occupation	trainer/assessors were unable to appreciate the context in which the participants were working in because of a lack of on-site visits to their place of work
have a positive team culture within their occupation, which has impacted on the level of support they have received from their colleagues	are not encouraged either by their employer mentor or their trainer/assessor to reflect on their learning during the apprenticeship
experience of apprenticeships has positively impacted on their perceptions of them. They all acknowledge that apprenticeships can be used across diverse levels, subject areas, and that there is no age cap for individuals that enrol to one	

Table 24 lists the findings that are shared with some of the participants:

TABLE 24: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, SOME PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCE (6-12 MONTHS)

<b>Some participants</b>	
<b>(Positive Experience)</b>	<b>(Negative Experience)</b>
that remained on their apprenticeship during month twelve were able to continue to access valuable support from their trainer/assessor	believed that they experienced being treated differently outside of their team because of being an apprentice
	experience negativity from their colleagues outside of their teams because of being on an apprenticeship
were able to access existing communities of practice within their occupation, as a result, participants felt valued and respected	experienced a limited access to the off-the-job entitlement, participants cited workload as the main contributing factor for this
that were in an effective community of practice in their training provider, are realising the benefits of one, and as a result they have a network of peers from which they can share ideas, challenge new ways of thinking, and learn from each other	equally, the same number of participants had limited access to a community of practice through the training provider, however they did appreciate that there is much to be gained from an effective community of practice

Table 25 lists the findings that are shared with a few of the participants:

TABLE 25: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, A FEW PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCE (6-12 MONTHS)

<b>A few participants</b>	
<b>(Positive Experience)</b>	<b>(Negative Experience)</b>
felt that they were treated like other professionals within their employment	continued to have limited access to existing communities of practice within their occupation
employers worked with them to identify opportunities to develop their knowledge, skills, and behaviours linked to the occupational standard that their apprenticeship was working towards covering	highlighted that because of the lack of a training plan there were multiple missed opportunities to learn on-the-job
professions are being considered within the delivery of the course content during sessions at their respective training providers	lived experiences influence their current opinion of what an apprenticeship is, and who they are for
	perceptions are influenced by how their experience of being an apprentice is regarded by the colleagues they work with
are encouraged to reflect on their apprenticeship, and to make links with what is happening within the organisation that benefits the business as well as the employee in meeting the knowledge, skills, and behaviours of an occupational standard	comments suggest that the support that they received from their trainer/assessor was below the participants' level of expectation
	did not want to raise issues out of fear of losing the support from their employer and training provider
	negative lived experience of any aspect of an apprenticeship can influence a change of perception

	experienced stress and anxiety because of issues related to the training provider
	did not have an initial assessment completed before they started on an apprenticeship, therefore their prior attainment and learning difficulties were missed

In addition to analysing the trends in phase three, Table 26 shows the retention rate of the participants from month three to six on their respective apprenticeship programme.

TABLE 26: MONTH 12 PARTICIPANT RETENTION RATE

<b>Month</b>	<b>sample size</b>	<b>Retention</b>	<b>Explanatory notes</b>
<b>Month 0-2</b>	9 participants	100%	All participants actively enrolled to an apprenticeship
<b>Month 3</b>	7 participants	78%	Two participants withdrew from their apprenticeship programme (P10, P13)
<b>Month 6</b>	6 participants	67%	One participant withdrew due to poor mental health citing excess workload and the apprenticeship as contributing factors (P12)
<b>Month 9</b>	5 participants	55%	One participant, P8 took a break in learning due to workload and personal pressures, therefore was



			withdrawn from this study. This was attributed to workload, and personal commitments.
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Participant P8 was not included in the focus group or questionnaire during phase three, this is because she had to take a break in learning from her respective apprenticeship programme during month nine, citing workload and personal commitments as the root causes. From reviewing P8's data since phase one shows the following:

- a) Starting an apprenticeship because of her employer contractual arrangements
- b) Unaware that she was required to complete an apprenticeship
- c) Perceptions were shaped by other individuals' experiences and views about apprenticeships
- d) Had limited understanding of apprenticeship policy, and what she was legally entitled to as an apprentice
- e) Have less access to pre-existing communities of practice within her respective job role relevant to her occupation as a lecturer in higher education
- f) Was unable to participate in new communities of practice with her apprentice peers, due to workload
- g) Was displeased with the level of support provided by her respective employer
- h) Was unable to access off-the-job learning because of being timetabled to teach on the day/time her apprenticeship session was scheduled
- i) Did not have a training plan in place, or time allocated for reflection

Most participants in phase three chose to enrol to an apprenticeship for career progression. P9 was an exception to this, however, unlike P8, he was aware that he was required to enrol to an apprenticeship if he decided that he wanted to pursue a change of career into teaching. Therefore, P9 applied for the lecturing role in the knowledge that he was going to be on an apprenticeship. Participant P7 remains on the apprenticeship, despite the challenges previously discussed with her training provider, she has confirmed that she is hopeful that she will pass her maths at level 2.

### **Phase Three: Synopsis of Findings**

From analysing the data from phase three, it shows that most participants experienced a positive change in their social identity and were now formalising a new identity aligned to the occupational job role that their apprenticeship was associated to. The findings in phase three also suggest that the participants' confidence had increased, thus they were able to apply the knowledge and skills gained from their apprenticeship within their respective occupations. This was despite having limited access to their off-the-job entitlement which was attributed to workload as the main contributing factor.

Most of the participants were within a team that had a positive culture towards learning, with exception to participant P6 who continued to experience negativity from across the organisation she worked for. Some participants continued to experience negativity amongst colleagues from outside of their direct teams because of being an existing staff member that became an apprentice. Most participants' perceptions did change overtime, especially compared to their initial perceptions during phase three. Most participants now view apprenticeships as being for any aged individual, across any sector, and at any occupational level. Most participants agreed that the pedagogical support provided by their training provider did not meet their expectations, consequentially, the training received required improvement. In addition, most participants stated that the training provided was not differentiated to meet the participants' professions and learning needs. In addition, most participants stated that their trainer/assessor did not visit them in their workplace, thus the trainer/assessor did not understand the context in which the participants worked in.

Finally, participants confirmed that they were not encouraged to reflect on their knowledge, skills, and behaviours developed during the apprenticeship either by their employer or the training provider, therefore, the participants were not able to assimilate or accommodate new learning to their existing schema. Some participants during month twelve confirmed that they were able to access support from their trainer/assessor and were in an effective community of practice within their training provider, and as a result they have a network of peers from which they can share ideas, challenge new ways of thinking, and learn from each other. Equally, the same number of participants had limited access to a community of practice through the training provider, however they did appreciate that there is much to be gained from an effective community of practice. Some participants could access existing communities of practice within

their occupation, because of this these participants felt valued and respected by their employer.

A few participants felt that they were treated like other professionals in their employment, consequentially, these participants identified as an employee doing professional development, rather than an apprentice, a learner, or worker. These participants' employers worked with them directly to reflect on their programme, and to support the participant to identify other opportunities across the organisation to develop new knowledge, skills, and behaviours aligned to the apprenticeship. Moreover, these participants' professions were also considered within the course content through respective training providers. A few participants' lived experiences continue to negatively influence their current perceptions of apprenticeships. In addition, a limited number of participants did not want to raise issues out of fear of losing the support from their employer and training provider. In addition, a partial number of the participants did not have an initial assessment completed before they started on an apprenticeship, therefore their prior attainment and learning difficulties were missed, this also caused anxiety and stress with a limited number of participants. The next chapter discusses the findings using existing literature and theories derived from the literature review.

## Chapter Six Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings in chapter five following the three research phases.

### Phase One: Discussion

The findings from phase one provides an early indication of how the participants' preconceptions of apprenticeships impact on their behaviour and social identity during their lived experience of being an apprentice. The preconceptions held by the participants were mostly shaped by other individuals' experiences and views about apprenticeships from within their social contexts (Turner et al., 1994). Like with Fuller et al. (2015) findings, their motive and desire for starting an apprenticeship as an established staff member was mixed. For most of the participants it was for career progression, however, it was also evident that the apprenticeship provided an opportunity to achieve something that was a longstanding ambition or barrier in which the participants' wanted to overcome.

A common preconception held by the participants was that apprenticeships were aimed at 'young people,' junior positions, and for vocational sectors. This resonates significantly with Fuller et al. (2015) research which attributed the association of apprenticeships being for school leavers or young people, which impacted on their respective participants' desire for starting an apprenticeship as an adult. Though, unlike Fuller et al. (2015) findings in the first instance most participants started their apprenticeship with a feeling of excitement and optimism. Similarly, the participants during phase one related apprenticeships to low skilled and non-academic roles, which echoes with Brockmann and Laurie (2016) findings. However, the participants from Brockmann and Laurie (2016) were from vocationally based courses at level 3 or below, and like Willis (1977) and Archer and Yamashita (2003) findings, these types of apprentices identified themselves as practical learners and non-academic.

Conversely, the participants within phase one, were studying higher apprenticeships, or indeed degree apprenticeships, and whilst the participants held the preconception that apprenticeships were for non-academic courses and were surprised that they were available for academic routes, they identified themselves more as individuals studying an academic course. This emphasises that the academic-vocational divide in learner identity on apprenticeships remains a challenge (Brockmann and Laurie, 2016), and demonstrates the nuances in this challenge depending upon the apprentices' background and

career choice (Fuller et al., 2015; Leonard et al., 2017; Cedefop, 2020). Moreover, the findings align well to the notion that individuals define their 'self-identity' based on their individual characteristics, and like suggested by Reicher and Stott (2011) it is this self-categorisation of being 'academic' or 'vocational' which determines their respective membership of a group and shared social identification (Hackel, Coppin, Wohl, and Van Bavel, 2018; Reicher and Hopkins, 2016). In addition, it is evident that the academic-vocational divide defined by Brockmann and Laurie (2016) was also apparent from the findings in phase one, but whereas the participants in Brockmann and Laurie (2016) study had inadvertently formed a membership based on vocational learners, the participants within phase one had formed an academic membership. These opposing groups have created their own respective 'in-group' (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), and consequentially, each is an 'out-group' to one another, which has resulted in several negative emotions and challenges (Haslam, 2004) for apprentices at any level, because as defined in chapter one, an apprenticeship constitutes of both on and off-the-job learning; thus, including practical and non-practical elements.

Like Fletcher (2019) study, as previously discussed the participants were studying higher or degree level apprenticeships, however unlike Fletcher (2019) findings, the participants' lived experiences of being an apprentice varied, with most participants not being able to have the legal entitlement of 20% off-the-job during their working week and experienced poor alignment and quality of on and off-the-job training. In fact, the findings from phase one were more closely aligned to those stated by Brockmann et al. (2021) where they found that apprentices in the Retail and Social Care sectors were primarily fully productive workers than learners, and in fact most apprentices were existing staff members that were required to complete further training. Like Brockmann et al. (2021) findings in the Retail and Social Care sectors, most employers in this study also viewed the off-the-job element of the apprenticeship as separate from their respective apprentices' job roles, thus, employers viewed this as the responsibility of the training provider, as a result in most cases, there was no attempt made to cross boundaries in terms of communities of practice from within the organisation and the training provider (Wenger, 1998).

Brockmann et al. (2021) findings in STEM related occupations were more aligned to the positive lived experiences of the solicitor apprentices as discussed in Fletcher (2019). Their collective findings demonstrates that an apprenticeship requires learners to cross boundaries, and therefore the apprenticeship becomes

an opportunity to remove the academic-vocational divide, and instead a newly formed group that intrinsically crosses the boundaries (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015) through on and off-the-job-learning is formed. These findings in Brockmann et al. (2021) and Fletcher (2019) were with groups of employers that demonstrated a clear understanding about what constitutes an apprenticeship, whereas in phase one, the findings suggests that most of the participants and their respective employers had limited understanding of apprenticeship policy, and what apprentices were legally entitled to. This is a critical finding in this study, which strengthens the requirements for a deeper involvement between the training provider, apprentice, and employer for a successful tripartite apprenticeship partnership. As stated by Haslam (2004) this would create an organisational social structure that cultivates a progressive learning environment. The absence of such a social structure as defined by Haslam (2004) and a prominent level of apprenticeship knowledge (Brockmann et al., 2021) was evidentially impacting on most participants, as most were encountering issues relating to their performance at work or in respect to their apprenticeship training and had received a negative reaction from a colleague at their place of work because of being an apprentice. There were several examples from phase one where the participants had experienced a poor organisational culture towards existing staff members becoming an apprentice, for example, participant P6 stated:

*"...the head nurse still saw me [as a] HCA [Health Care Assistant] and not as an apprentice nurse so she just expected me [to] do HCA duties and not nursing... it's a shame that this culture exists because there's a gun to your head like if you don't do the HCA role instead then I won't help you become a nurse."*

Similarly, P12 stated that:

*"My employer as a whole does not recognise the work required on an apprenticeship, so they're not worth telling, they will see it as an excuse for not hitting my targets."*

These examples were in the majority from the findings and their negative encounters came across the organisation, to suggest a crowd situation had formed a collective group in which shared a negative perception of those who become apprentices as an existing staff member (Drury and Reicher, 2020), consequentially a few participants were left out of existing communities of practice within their employment. This caused the participants confusion regarding their professional identity, with some experiencing a feeling of loss of professional identity since starting an apprenticeship. Unlike Fuller et al. (2015) and Heikkinen and Lassmigg (2015) concept of a workers and learners' dual

identity, a few participants did not identify as an apprentice or as their position within their employing organisation instead they identified as their previous occupations. Towards month three of the participants' lived experience of being an apprentice, there was some evidence to suggest that in some cases their lived experience was improving. This was mostly from the participants that were able to access existing communities of practice from within their organisation. Most participants saw the value in communities of practice within the workplace and their respective training provider, despite that most did not have access to a community of practice within their off-the-job learning. From those participants that could access a community of practice it enabled them to share ideas, and strategies from those who were experiencing similar issues (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Drury and Reicher, 2020). Consequentially, they were starting to be able to challenge their preconceptions of apprenticeships and make more progress towards on and off-the-job training.

There were a few participants within phase one that were having a more positive experience, namely participants P7, P11, and P14. These participants could continue to access existing communities of practice within their employment. However, their access to communities of practice with their respective training providers did vary, for example P7 did not have any established community of practice within her off-the-job training:

*"I mean, it would be good if there were... like a network thing set up and that kind of support[s] the group to share concerns and experiences. I do not even know what my peers look like, they keep their cameras off, we do not ever meet up, and are not encouraged to go into groups, or share ideas."*

However, in P7's case, her employer was extremely supportive, and regularly got involved in her apprenticeship, and ensured that P7 was able to access off-the-job training and encouraged P7 to make links between her on and off-the-job learning. Like P7, P14 has a supportive employer, and despite the training provider not purposively setting up a community of practice, there was a significant investment in ensuring that apprentices networked together, P14 stated:

*"They [training provider] didn't organise the group, but they did do lots of getting to know each other activities, this helped to break down barriers, and it's making me better at my apprenticeship."*

This resulted in P14 establishing his own community of practice which he actively engages with to share ideas and discuss any common concerns. In terms of P11, he was supported by his employer, but often was unable to spend

any time off-the-job due to his workload, however his training provider did purposively create a community of practice, P11 defined this as:

*"It has been good... I have benefited a lot from it, and for morale. We share ideas, discuss assignments, and we are relating how our jobs relate to the course... there is four of us... the induction activities arranged by them [training provider] really help[ed] us to gel, we were asked to form small working groups, which they called a community of learning."*

The commonality between this group of participants was that they had a positive on and/or off-the-job experience, but the most significant commonality was a mostly positive learning culture within their respective employment, and a high-level understanding of apprenticeships. It was clear that these participants' experiential learning was benefitting from having a clear employment structure in place (Fletcher, 2019). In addition, their employers were encouraging them to develop new knowledge through the alignment of their apprenticeship to their on-the-job experience (Kolb, 2015). Consequentially, these participants were learning new skills, new attitudes, and new ways of thinking (Ritchie, 2011). Conversely, participants P10, and P13 withdrew from the apprenticeship programme in month three, their experience shares similar traits with P12 who remains on the apprenticeship programme by month three. All these participants' have a common motive for starting the apprenticeship was out of fear from being made redundant, their lived experience of being an existing member of staff that then became an apprentice differed compared to P7, P11, P14. The main commonality between the experiences shared between P10, P12 and P13 is the lack of understanding of apprenticeships, poor organisational support structure, and a lack of alignment of their respective apprenticeship programme and their employment responsibilities.

Collectively, this lack of experiential learning and reflection resulted in an incoherent, and unsustainable learning experience (Miettinen, 2000). The remaining participants, namely P6, P8, P9 were all having a varied experience, the commonality between these participants was firstly between P8 and P9, this was because they are both studying towards becoming a Lecturer in Higher Education and were experiencing varying levels of support from both on and off-the-job learning. For example, P8 is unable to attend training sessions with her respective training provider because of her teaching workload. However, there is more similarity between P6 (Nursing apprentice) and P9 with regards to their determination to achieve the apprenticeship despite the barriers that they are currently facing. These participants are continuing to make progress towards their apprenticeship by month three, but less progress than P7, P11, P14.



**In summary phase one has identified that generally:**

- common preconceptions held by the participants were that apprenticeships are aimed at 'young people,' junior positions, low skilled, non-academic roles and for vocational sectors
- employees' preconceptions of an apprenticeship are formed through their social contexts
- preconceptions do impact on most participants' social identity and behaviours, especially through the identification of an academic-vocational divide which remains a challenge within the apprenticeship provision
- like with the Retail and Social Care sectors, participants were primarily fully productive workers than learners
- most employers in this study also viewed the off-the-job element of the apprenticeship as separate from their respective apprentices' job roles
- the absence of a social structure and a prominent level of apprenticeship knowledge was impacting on most participants, and because of this, they were encountering issues relating to their performance and organisational standing
- a few participants did not identify as an apprentice or as their position within their employing organisation, instead they identified as their previous occupation
- towards month three, there was some evidence to suggest that in some cases the participants' lived experience was improving. This was mostly from the participants that were able to access existing communities of practice from within their organisation
- most participants saw the value in communities of practice within the workplace and their respective training provider, despite that most did not have access to a community of practice within their off-the-job learning
- from those participants that could access a community of practice it enabled them to share ideas, and strategies from those who were experiencing similar issues, consequentially, they were starting to be able to challenge their preconceptions of apprenticeships and make more progress towards on and off-the-job training
- a positive learning culture within employment, and a high-level of understanding of apprenticeships increases the participants' experiential learning experience

- where employers cultivate a positive learning environment, and have a good understanding of apprenticeships, the participants can develop new knowledge through the alignment of their apprenticeship to their on-the-job experience

## **Phase Two: Discussion**

At phase two the participants have experienced at least three months of being an existing member of staff that became an apprentice; thus, their lived experiences have now started to stabilise. The findings during phase two demonstrate that whilst some participants' perceptions of apprenticeships have improved, there were equally participants that continued to have the same negative perceptions of apprenticeships as they did during phase one. The key driver for this was based on the participants' lived experience of being an apprentice, for some who were having a positive lived experience their perceptions of apprenticeships improved, whereas the participants that were having a negative lived experience were encountering processes of self-reflected appraisal (Srivastava, 2012) which affirmed their negative preconceptions of apprenticeships from which they held. For example, during phase one, P12's preconception was that apprenticeships were aimed at 'young people'. Consistently P12 referred to her age during discussions regarding some of the difficulties she has been experiencing as an apprentice:

*"[...] as a very mature person I find this extremely difficult to manage, especially as I need more time to absorb what I am supposed to be doing on the apprenticeship"*

This resonates with Fuller et al. (2015) who stated that the consolidation of 'older' and 'apprentice' presents a challenge to normative understandings of what the 'right age' is for a person on an apprenticeship programme. Exploring this notion further, P6's prior perception was that apprenticeships were for 'young people', this preconception was reaffirmed during phase one, P6 stated that:

*"She looked shocked cause' I am older than other apprentices... she was like, oh I am surprised, I thought you wanted to remain as a Healthcare practitioner"*

P6's collective data since phase one suggest that there is a lack of apprenticeship knowledge within her place of work, which may explain why her colleague looked shocked from discovering that P6 was an apprentice. To change the preconception of apprenticeships being for 'young people,' the findings in phase two demonstrate the need to promote apprenticeships as a mode of study

that is available to all regardless of age (Fuller et al., 2015). For example, Lave and Wenger (1991) stated that a newcomer to an organisation becomes an experienced staff member, and eventually an 'old timer' within a community of practice. As previously discussed in the literature review, this use of language is unhelpful in promoting lifelong learning regardless of any age, especially considering that current apprenticeship data (Gov.UK, 2022c) demonstrates that most apprentices are adults aged 25 and over. Furthermore, studies such as Hupkau (2015) and the DfE's Employer Skills Survey (2019) suggest that more employers will continue to use the apprenticeship levy as a method to upskill existing staff.

From the phase two findings the participants that were within an organisation that created a culture of learning were more successful during on and off-the-job learning. This was despite whether they held a negative perception of apprenticeships, and if the quality of training they received from an associated training provider was not meeting their expectations. This is not to suggest that the quality of training provided by a training provider is not important, on the contrary it is a critical component of the apprenticeship journey, however it does support Turner and Haslam (2001) findings that a successful apprenticeship programme is highly dependent on the features of any specific organisational context. Haslam (2004) defines an organisation as a social structure that changes an individual's feelings, goals, values, motives, attitudes, and beliefs. Therefore, participants such as P6 and P12 that are part of an organisation where 'age' is viewed as a form of an 'in-group' membership (Stets, 2018) through a 'self' characterisation (Reicher and Stott, 2011) as a mature person will at least initially experience negative emotions from joining an out-group community of practice which they deem as being for 'younger people' (Tajfel, 1970; Turner and Haslam, 2001). This was further demonstrated when P6 experienced further negativity from her previous colleagues that she worked with before starting the apprenticeship:

*"There were sneery comments from a couple of healthcare practitioners, you know like 'you're not with us today,' it's water off a duck's back to me, you know just because I'm working as a nurse"*

The 'sneery comments' received from P6's colleagues were likely to be because they now view P6 as a person from an out-group (Tajfel, 1970; Turner and Haslam, 2001), which created a negative societal perceptual output (Heikkinen and Lassmigg, 2015; Leonard et al., 2017) towards P6. The examples provided align to social identity theory, there were many other examples of where the participants were experiencing difficulties from crossing boundaries (Trayner et

al., 2015), or indeed leaving one group to establish themselves within another, for example, during phase one P9 stated:

*"I am a police officer pretending to be a student [...]. Now I pretend to be a lecturer"*

Like Fuller and Unwin (2015), and Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015) findings, the process of moving between groups triggered specific behaviours and emotions within P9. However, during phase two, the findings suggest that identity theory overlap (Stets, 2018) was at play, for example, P9's previous social identity of being a Police Officer was being shaped by his apprenticeship, and unlike P6's previously discussed experience, P9 is receiving positive societal perceptual outputs (Heikkinen and Lassmigg, 2015; Leonard et al., 2017) from his colleagues:

*"I think because I was in the Police force, I have lots of experience, and people see me progressing higher within my job as a lecturer."*

*"I have sat in others' lectures to capture elements and aid my personal development. This has been reciprocated by more experienced lecturers, which of course to me makes me very proud."*

During phase two, P9 elicits positive emotions and behaviours regarding his apprenticeship this was because of his given situation that aligned well to his identity standard (Stets and Trettevik, 2014) as a Police Officer, along with a positive reflected appraisal triggered by the feedback from his colleagues, this then resulted in P9 achieving identity verification (Burke and Stets, 2009) as a Lecturer in Policing.

The commonality between the participants that became more positive about apprenticeships and their respective journeys during phase two was the support given by their employer. The participants that were experiencing issues as an apprentice within their occupation and those that have withdrawn from the apprenticeship programme during phase one to two were working within an organisation where there was limited support and commitment from their respective employers. This supports the suggestion of Leonard et al. (2017) that for adult training schemes to succeed it requires some fundamental changes to be made in understandings of age within the workplace. In addition, the findings in phase two suggest the need for workplaces to consider other characteristics such as social identity to enable individuals to succeed on their apprenticeship programmes and reduce the 'drop-out'/withdrawals on apprenticeships more generally (Böhn and Deutscher, 2022). Finally, the participants in phase two overwhelmingly agreed that employers' knowledge of apprenticeships was a critical factor in determining the level of support existing employees who upskill

using an apprenticeship received, especially as most participants reported that their respective employer did not have adequate apprenticeship knowledge, and as a result most participants were not able to access their off-the-job training and have a named person (Fuller and Unwin, 2015)/employer mentor in place. Collectively, this supports the recommendation in Cedefop (2020) for the need of a differentiated apprenticeship policy that considers the diverse range of adult characteristics.

The phase two findings identified the support that most participants received from their respective trainer/assessor required improvement, this was previously noted as a concern from Fuller (2016) who suggested that because of the apprenticeship reforms there could be a tension created between quality versus quantity in the apprenticeship provision in England. The issue regarding quality of training had further developed on the phase one findings which identified that most participants were disappointed with the pedagogical practice provided by their respective training providers. For some participants the issue was with the lack of availability of their trainer/assessor, whereas for others it was in respect to the level of support they received and alignment of the off-the-job-training to their occupation, this coupled with the lack of the participants' recognised apprentice status in their employment, deviated from Fuller et al. (2015) and Heikkinen and Lassmigg (2015) suggestion that apprentices have a dual identity of 'worker' and 'learner', which is determined by whether they are working on-the-job, or off-the-job, respectively. Whilst the findings in phase two suggest some alignment with this notion, the issues related to the participants' on and off-the-job experience are more nuanced than Fuller et al. (2015) and Heikkinen and Lassmigg (2015) notion of a dual identity. For example, P6 stated that:

*"So, I am either a healthcare assistant doing all the important but menial jobs, [and at these times] I will be viewed as that, and no one will think of me as training to be a nurse whatsoever, and then I can have a day like yesterday where I worked with a nurse all day. [...], so, I [have] many different identities."*

Some of the participants like P11, and P12 shared this view, as shown below respectively,

*"Like P6, you know, I wear many hats. [...] I mean, I have imposter syndrome across all hats as well."*

*"So, for me I have to also wear multiple hats, and often get confused which area I should be focusing on."*

These examples of having hierarchies of prominence (McCall and Simmons, 1978) of the participants' identity during their apprenticeship journey were shaped by these participants' social structural realities and intergroup relationships they experienced whilst on the apprenticeship (Turner et al., 1994). The reality for most participants was that because their employers did not recognise their apprentice status, the participants were not being acknowledged as a 'learner' whilst being on-the-job, consequentially, employers were not ensuring there was an effective training plan in place to support the alignment of their employees' apprenticeship programme. Similarly, training providers were not differentiating their pedagogical practice in recognition of the participants' 'worker' status, therefore off-the-job learning was not being effectively related to the participants' profession. P14's experience of being an apprentice as an existing staff member provides a partial blueprint to an effective approach for employers and training providers to adopt, he stated that:

*"I identify as an employee just like my other colleagues, doing professional development."*

P14 was the only participant who had a positive lived experience on and off-the-job, he also only identified as an employee, as he did not see the need to separate out his identity as a 'learner' and 'worker', this was because his training plan was shaped to provide a holistic 'learning' experience (Parker, 2006) which was developed in partnership with P14, his employer, and training provider. Consequentially, his employer actively engaged in his apprenticeship and acknowledged his identity as a 'learner' in all aspects of P14's job role. Equally, his training provider encouraged the process of assimilating and accommodating knowledge (Piaget, 1936 and 1957) through intrinsically relating the taught material to P14's profession. Therefore, P14 was using new knowledge derived holistically from across all components of his apprenticeship to transform this into reliable knowledge, which he then tested through 'doing' and then reflecting upon (Kolb, 2015). Because of this influence (Haslam, 2004) on P14's social identity and lived experience, he was demonstrating an increase in motivation, improvement in self-awareness and personal responsibility (Ritchie, 2011).

However, like P14, most participants were not benefitting from an established community of practice that facilitated their adaptation to and assimilation of various skills, procedures, and institutional norms (Parker, 2006). In addition, because of poor alignment between the participants' on and off-the-job learning, and lack of employer commitment/knowledge of apprenticeships, there was no named person (Fuller and Unwin, 2015), or systems convener (Wenger-Trayner

et al., 2015), to support the participants to weave both boundaries and peripheries (Wenger, 1998) of the communities of practice that exist within their employment, and with their respective training provider. From the phase two findings, it shows that for the participants that engaged in a community of practice within their respective training providers they were not able to experience the full benefits of one because of a lack of terms of reference or a framework that provides clarity of the group's purpose. Fuller and Unwin (2003) suggest a shortcoming in Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of a community of practice, in that it does not include a role for formal educational institutions, the findings from phase one and two agree with Fuller and Unwin (2003), and goes further by suggesting that an educational institution/trainer provider should support the participants and their employer mentors (or systems conveners) to identify opportunities for crossing boundaries, and to ensure that participants have access to an effective community of practice with their apprentice peers.

One participant, P12, withdrew from the apprenticeship programme during month six citing poor mental health and excess workload as the contributing factors. P12's lived experience shared similar traits with P10 and P13 who both withdrew from their apprenticeship during phase one. Their poor apprenticeship lived experience demonstrates the importance for employers and training providers to work more collectively with their employees to ensure their respective apprenticeship commitments are understood; system conveners and trainer/assessor are in place and working effectively together to support the apprentice to make progress; and a training plan is created that considers the employee's holistic learning experience and social identity. Collectively the phase two findings suggest that this approach would provide a clear structure (Fletcher, 2019), that benefits the apprentice, employer, and training provider to understand their respective responsibilities. However, from reviewing the frequency of when participants withdrew, it suggests that an individual's apprenticeship journey, including a review of the quality of commitments, are reviewed on a regular basis to account to changes in circumstance, and to address areas of non-compliance with respective commitments, and training plan.

The remaining participants, namely P6, P7, P9, P11, and P14, apprenticeship journey has improved in at least one aspect compared to their lived experience during phase one. P8 has not withdrawn but was unable to participate during phase two due to illness. P8 lived experience suggests that she could be at risk of withdrawing, this will be explored during phase three.

**In summary phase two has identified that generally:**

- participants lived experience during month three to six improved during phase two
- the apprenticeship was improving their career prospects, and general organisational standing within their occupation
- some participants' perceptions of apprenticeships had improved compared to phase one
- equally, other participants' negative perceptions regarding apprenticeships are being reaffirmed because of their lived experience during phase two
- workloads were not adjusted since starting an apprenticeship
- like with phase one, most participants were not able to effectively engage with their 20% off-the-job learning due to their work commitments
- participants that have a supportive employer are more likely to make progress on their apprenticeship programme
- where a participant's apprenticeship status is not being recognised by their employer, and their professional experience is not being referred to during off-the job learning, then they are more likely to experience multiple identities
- training providers did not create a community of practice, and where the participants did instead, engagement was varied
- the quality of support from training providers required improvement
- more is required to promote apprenticeships as a mode of study that is available to all regardless of age
- participants with a lived experience that encapsulates a holistic learning approach improves their respective progress on their apprenticeship, and supports them to develop a social identity that accommodates both on and off-the-job learning
- the participants' social identity during the apprenticeship is more nuanced than just 'worker' and 'learner'
- systems conveners and trainer/assessors should be in place to identify opportunities for an apprentice to cross boundaries from existing communities of practice in employment, with those which are established within the trainer provider



### **Phase Three: Discussion**

This discussion will reflect upon the collective phases from one to three to explore using literature the participants' lived experiences that withdrew from their apprenticeship programme, compared to those that remained after a twelve-month period. The comparisons of the findings will be aligned against the research questions (see chapter 3.5).

### **Phase Three: Reflection of participants that withdrew**

From reviewing the collective data of the participants that withdrew (P10, P12, P13) or took a break in learning (P8) from their respective apprenticeship during phase one to three, the data suggests the following trends:

#### ***Employer determined reason for starting an apprenticeship***

The findings suggest that these participants enrolled to an apprenticeship programme as an existing employer for either the fear of being made redundant, or as a requirement of a contract of employment to change roles within their organisation. For the latter, this was P8's experience, however, P8 was unaware that participation on an apprenticeship was a requirement of her new contract. Consequently, the participants' desire for starting an apprenticeship was not driven by their own career ambition, but of one to secure employment (Böhn and Deutscher, 2022).

This resonates with Fuller et al. (2015) findings that demonstrated that the desire for adults to participate in an apprenticeship was mixed. Similarly, it supports the requirement for the UK government to have a more effective apprenticeship policy (Böhn and Deutscher, 2022; Cedefop, 2020) in place to determine the apprentices' post-apprenticeship vision (Fuller and Unwin, 2003). This is especially prudent because unlike P10, P12, P13 purposes for starting an apprenticeship, which was out of fear of being made redundant, an apprenticeship should be for a productive job role (Education Skills Funding Agency: Employers, 2022), and not for the purpose of staff training for job roles that are at-risk of being made redundant. It should be noted that the apprenticeship funding rules (Education Skills Funding Agency: Employers, 2022) does stipulate the importance of alignment of an apprenticeship standard to a productive job role, however the findings within this study demonstrate the requirement for more robust checks on whether employers are fulfilling their commitments in this regard (Deutscher, 2022). As demonstrated with P10, P12, and P13, they all reported that their respective occupations did not align to the

knowledge, skills, and behaviours of the occupational standard associated to their apprenticeship programme, which suggests that their employers and training providers have not conducted an effective initial assessment, which again is a requirement of the apprenticeship funding rules. Collectively, this demonstrates that the drive to increase apprenticeships (HM Revenue and Customs, 2016), has created a tension of quality versus quantity in the apprenticeship provision in England (Fuller, 2016).

### ***Perceptions of apprenticeship were shaped by others***

All the participants' perceptions were formed from conversations with others, these include colleagues, friends, and family members. All participants' socio-economic backgrounds and past experiences of learning varied (Brockmann and Laurie, 2016), despite this, they all shared the perceptions that apprenticeships were for mainly 'young people' (Fuller et al., 2015), junior positions, and vocational occupations, such as Construction and so forth. Consequentially, like the findings in Fuller et al. (2015), these participants were struggling with the concept of being labelled as an apprentice. With exception to P8, the other participants' perceptions of apprenticeships remained consistent throughout the research until they withdrew from the apprenticeship programme. This was attributed to how being an apprentice as an existing staff member negatively impacted on their organisational standing from being seen as having an 'outgroup' membership as an apprentice (Tajfel et al., 1979), and because of the lack of recognition of their professional status through their training provider. This changed their social context of employment, which previously was a determining factor of their organisational behaviour (Haslam, 2004).

Collectively, their participation on, and perception of apprenticeships impacted on their behaviours. Unlike the study conducted by Collins, Brown, and Newman (1987), these apprentices were not 'newcomers' to the organisation in which they worked in; therefore, they had become accustomed to well established norms, behaviours, and beliefs from their prior experience. The findings suggest that these participants had experienced identity theory overlap (Stets, 2018), consequentially, the participants were unclear on their roles within the organisation, especially compared to their previous role before starting the apprenticeship. This experience of 'identity overlap' triggered responses in their behaviour, which included frustration, anxiety, and anger.

The participants' interactions with their colleagues and line managers as an apprentice, further added complications to their social identity, largely because

of negative interactions, Burke (1991), the participants encountered when their workloads were not adjusted in accordance with the apprenticeship funding rules and associated occupational standard. Because of these encounters, the participants became confused about their position within the organisation. Consequentially, participants started to experience feelings of low self-esteem, self-doubt, and a general feeling of not being respected within the organisation in which they were employed. As previously stated, P8 was the divergence within this group, whilst P8 experienced the same encounters as previously discussed, her perception of apprenticeships did change overtime, for example in phase three, P8 stated that she was starting to identify as a Lecturer, which was aligned to her apprenticeship programme. Notably, despite that P8 did not realise the apprenticeship was a condition of her new contract, it was however helping P8 to secure her career ambition (Böhn and Deutscher, 2022), this was not the case for other participants, and undoubtedly this had provoked P8's positive attitude towards learning (Korte, 2007).

#### ***Limited understanding of apprenticeships (employer and participant)***

The collective data suggests that neither the participants' or their employers understood what constitutes an apprenticeship, and therefore, what their commitments as apprentices and employers are in accordance with the apprenticeship funding rules (Education Skills Funding Agency: Employers, 2022). As previously identified, for participants P10, P12, and P13, the employer should have consulted the funding rules before permitting these participants to enrol on an apprenticeship, especially because their respective roles were at risk of redundancy and had limited alignment with the apprenticeship occupational standard that they were studying towards. These participants' occupations therefore did not fulfil the criteria of a productive job role aligned against a specific occupational standard. This should have also been identified through an initial assessment which is conducted in collaboration with the training provider, employer, and apprentice (Education Skills Funding Agency: Employers, 2022).

Conversely, due to the lack of apprenticeship knowledge, the participants did not appreciate that as apprentices they have a legal entitlement to 20% off-the-job training, nor did their employer ensure that the participants' workloads and targets were adjusted to enable their employees to access this (Richmond, 2017). This issue was highlighted by Heikkinen and Lassmigg (2015) who stated that there is a potential risk that some employers will not enculturate a constructivist approach to learning, which could result in apprentices finding it difficult to make progress on apprenticeships that do not share themes with a

dual system of vocational educational training. For all concerned participants, the findings suggests that the participants received limited to no support from their employer, these findings resonate well with the conclusions from Brockmann et al. (2021) which showed that apprentices were primarily fully workers than learners, thus employers viewed the apprenticeship as the sole responsibility of the training provider. Like with Brockmann et al. (2021), the findings with these participants were that there was little interaction between the employer and training provider; thus, opportunities to develop a holistic training plan were missed.

Furthermore, due to a lack of apprenticeship knowledge, like as in the case with non-STEM related occupations in Brockmann et al. (2021), the findings from this study suggest that apprenticeships were a new concept within the associated organisations, therefore there was a lack of an apprenticeship strategy in place to create a culture of learning where apprenticeships are widely understood across the organisation (Fuller and Unwin, 2015). This would have limited the impact on the participants' social identity through an organisationally understood apprenticeship shared social identification (Hackel, Coppin, Wohl, and Van Bavel, 2018; Reicher and Hopkins, 2016), and enabled the participants to have remained within an 'in-group' (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), whilst crossing boundaries with newly formed memberships with other apprentices (Trayner et al., 2015). This would have reduced any negative preconceptions held by other employees and enabled the employer and participant to benefit from the apprenticeship, as was evident in the STEM related occupations as discussed by Brockmann et al. (2021).

### ***Limited access to high quality learning***

The participants all expressed dissatisfaction with the level of education and training they received. The findings suggest that the learning that participants encountered through a training provider was not differentiated according to the context in which they worked, thus, participants found it a challenge to assimilate and accommodate any new learning (Mills, 2011), and the learning received was not personalised to meet their individual learning needs. With exception to P8, the other participants' trainer/assessor did not visit the participants within their place of work, therefore the trainer/assessor was unable to understand the context in which the participants worked in. These findings align well to the concerns raised by Fuller and Unwin (2003) who stated that there should be more focus on off-the-job learning within apprenticeships. Participants were virtually studying all their apprenticeship on-the-job, especially

due to being existing staff members before starting the apprenticeship, consequentially, there were limited opportunities for reflection (Fuller and Unwin, 2003). The participants had reduced access to existing communities of practice within their workplace from before starting an apprenticeship. Moreover, communities of practice were not a key feature of their respective organisation, Wenger et al. (2002), thus, the learning aspects of working within a community were not a focus. Moreover, when the participants did partake within a form of a community of practice within employment, they were unable to make links, and provoke interest with their colleagues regarding the apprenticeship, therefore there was no opportunity of participatory memory to support and challenge the participants' learning journey (Fuller and Unwin, 2003). This was because of a lack of alignment with the participants' apprenticeship to their occupation and overall business need, thus, their colleagues did not engage, because for them the apprenticeship was not a common endeavour (Eckert, 2006) of the business or within the group of colleagues.

Furthermore, the training providers did not encourage, or establish an effective community of practice for the participants to become a member of.

Consequentially, the participants were unable to develop their identity from a shared domain, develop a network of peers with a shared common goal, and discuss and share good practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015) stated that there is too much focus on a single community of practice for apprentices, thus, the apprenticeship journey was restrictive (Fuller and Unwin, 2003). However, the findings in this study suggest that some participants did not have access to any communities of practice where they could learn and share experiences with other group members with a common venture (Eckert, 2006). As previously discussed, the training providers and employers did not frame the participants' learning through a dynamic process of guidance, support, and co-construction or re-conceptualisation of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991), this was also apparent because of a lack of a co-constructed training plan. When asked, participants were unaware of any training plan, this was despite being on-programme for several weeks, and in some cases months. A training plan is a condition of the apprenticeship funding rules in England (Education Skills Funding Agency: Main Providers, 2022), therefore, the absence of one suggests that the training plan has either not been created, or at the very least not reviewed on a regular basis with the employers and the participants. Because of the absence of a training plan, opportunities to create knowledge through the transformation of experience (Kolb, 2015) were

missed. This is demonstrated from the findings which suggest that the participants were unable to involve themselves fully and openly without bias in their new experiences that being an apprentice should have given them. Moreover, due to workload and a lack of their learner status being recognised (Fuller and Unwin, 2003), the participants were not able to reflect on their apprenticeship journey or create new ideas using theory (Kolb, 1984) and knowledge gained to make decisions and solve problems that they encountered (Bergsteiner et al., 2010; Jarvis, 2012). Finally, the collective findings from the participants that withdrew suggests that participants either had no identified employer mentor, or where there was one, their employer mentor was not an individual who exhibits diverging learning abilities to effectively bring diverse groups together to create an extended in-group membership (Drury and Reicher, 2020) and community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) under a shared goal. An employer mentor should be a systems convener (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015) to support the participants to cross boundaries (Wenger, 1998) of communities of practice, and to support the participants through their experiential learning within the workplace and through the training provider.

Overall, the findings suggest that the participants' apprenticeship experience was restrictive (Fuller and Unwin, 2003). Furthermore, the absence of a training plan, and an effective partnership between an employer mentor and trainer/assessor resulted in a lack of partnership to support the participants' learning needs; identification of synergies between on and off-the-job learning; opportunities for the participants to cross boundaries; and experiential and situated learning.

### **Phase Three: Reflection of participants that were retained**

From reviewing the collective data of the participants (P6, P7, P8, P11, and P14) that remain on their respective apprenticeship during phase one to three, the data suggests the following trends:

#### ***Participant determined reason for starting an apprenticeship***

As established in phase one, the motive and desire for starting an apprenticeship by all participants as an existing staff member was mixed (Fuller et al., 2015). For the participants that were still on-programme by month twelve, they decided to enrol to an apprenticeship with a clear sense of purpose, moreover, these participants chose to become an apprentice for career progression and to achieve a personal longstanding ambition (Böhn and Deutscher, 2022). Korte

(2007) suggests that apprentices' social identity has implications for learning within their organisation, for example, their attitude towards learning as part of their job role. This is the most significant differentiating factor between the participants that remained on-programme, compared to those who withdrew from the apprenticeship.

The only participants that withdrew were those that had an employer determined reason for enrolling to an apprenticeship, therefore these participants were required to start an apprenticeship either as part of a contract of employment or for job security. This is especially evident because a few of the participants that remained on-programme by month twelve had a comparable lived experience to those who withdrew, and in some cases worse, for example P6, she experienced significant issues on and off-the-job, including experiencing extreme negativity and mistreatment from her colleagues, and a Head Nurse. Moreover, when P6 decided to become a Nursing apprentice, it required her to leave an 'in-group' membership (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), of Healthcare Assistants, and cross boundaries (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015), to become a member of a Nursing group, which was seen by members of her previous group as an 'out-group'. P6 found herself stuck between groups and was experiencing negative emotions now from both groups (Haslam, 2004). P6's lived experience in this regard was made worse by her employer's decision to require P6 to work in her previous role at times when the Healthcare setting was understaffed. Despite these issues, P6 has remained consistent in her determination in becoming a Nurse through the apprenticeship programme that she chose to enrol to.

These findings align to Cedefop (2020), which stated that an apprenticeship training approach should consider that adult apprentices will be more motivated, this was the case for the participants that chose to be an apprentice but was not the case for those that were directed by their employers to enrol onto an apprenticeship programme. Moreover, the findings do have some alignment with Fletcher (2022), this is because the participants that remained on-programme, like the solicitor apprentices in Fletcher (2022) had recognised what they want their long-term identity to become before starting the apprenticeship, e.g., a solicitor, or in the case of this study, a Nurse, a HE (Higher Education) Lecturer, a Digital Marketer and so forth. For this reason, as suggested by Fletcher (2022), the apprenticeship model was effective, as it placed the participants in the role of a professional practitioner, from which will enable them to achieve their desired professional identity (Katz, 2013). Similarly, this was the case also

in Brockmann et al. (2021), who identified that apprentices studying in STEM related occupations had chosen to be on an apprenticeship to achieve the professional identity of a skilled individual within their chosen occupation, which consequentially improved their engagement and apprenticeship outcome. Like with Fletcher (2022) and Brockmann et al. (2021) the participants that remained on-programme, were experiencing that their identities were being shaped from being in interactive settings (Owens, Robinson, and Smith-Lovin, 2010) aligned to their career ambitions, moreover, that because of their participation in their chosen future careers, the participants were 'being', and 'doing' the roles that they aspired to identify as (Stets and Burke, 2000), which is why they continued to remain motivated on their apprenticeship, compared to others who did not choose to become an apprentice to establish a new identity within an occupation, but for the purpose of securing employment out a fear of being made redundant or not realising that the apprenticeship was part of their contract of employment.

### ***Perceptions of apprenticeship improved***

Considering the participants that withdrew from their apprenticeship programme, their initial perceptions of apprenticeships were being re-enforced because of their lived experiences, for example, apprenticeships are for 'young people,' (Fuller et al., 2015), whereas for the participants that remained during phase three, their initial negative perceptions of apprenticeships improved throughout their apprenticeship journey. The findings suggest there is alignment of the participants' purpose for doing an apprenticeship and whether their perception of apprenticeships improves overtime. This was the case for all participants that remained, and for P8 that took a break in learning during phase three. As previously stated P8 wanted to be a HE Lecturer but had not initially realised that the apprenticeship was a condition of her contract. Whilst there is some evidence to suggest this decreased P8's motivation towards the apprenticeship, it was apparent that her engagement in, and perception of, apprenticeships was improving over the duration of her apprenticeship. As was the case in Fuller et al. (2015) and with the participants that withdrew, initially most of the participants that remained on-programme during month twelve originally struggled with the concept of being labelled as an apprentice. However, their perceptions of apprenticeships improved, despite from some initial negative impact on a few of the participants' organisational standing because of being an apprentice. Though, their organisational standing did also improve as the participants were working towards achieving what was perceived



within their occupational setting as a more desirable professional identity, e.g., Nurse, HE Lecturer, and so forth.

The findings suggest that their social context of employment improved during their apprenticeship, and as a result they were starting to change their behaviours to those expected from within the occupational role that their apprenticeships were directly aligned to (Haslam, 2004; Stets, 2018). For these participants, their perceptions improved because they were starting to transition their social identity from a starting point of a multiple self and varied identity perspectives (McCall and Simmons, 1978), to formalise a new professional identity through internalised meanings which were attached to their aspiring role (Stets and Burke, 2014; Stets and Serpe, 2013). Consequentially, this reduced their initial identity overlap (Stets, 2018), unlike the unclear social identities that the participants that withdrew continued to experience.

The remaining participants were establishing a much clearer trajectory of what their social identity is to become and were at least starting to participate in 'in-group' memberships (Tajfel et al., 1979), and 'intergroup relationships' (Turner et al., 1994), that were aligned to their career trajectory; thus, these participants started to experience a change in their feelings, goals, values, motives, attitudes, and beliefs (Haslam, 2004). Finally, the remaining participants were starting to feel a sense of belonging, and because of this, the apprenticeship became a source of pride and self-esteem (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), that in turn improved their perceptions of apprenticeships, which now they all acknowledged can be used across diverse levels, subject areas, and ages.

### ***Developed their understanding of apprenticeships (employer and participant)***

Like with the participants that withdrew, some of the participants that remained during phase three, neither them nor their employers understood what constitutes an apprenticeship at the start of their programme. With exception to P7 and P14, the participants' employers were not fulfilling their commitments (Deutscher, 2022), in accordance with the apprenticeship funding rules (Education Skills Funding Agency: Employers, 2022), and like Leonard et al. (2017) findings, the management of apprenticeships within the participants' employment was 'out of step' for existing staff members that became apprentices. For P7 and P14, their on-the-job experience remained positive throughout their apprenticeship journey, this was because their employers had an effective apprenticeship strategy in place (Böhn and Deutscher, 2022;

Cedefop, 2020). Consequentially, P7's and P14's lived experiences of their occupational aspect of the apprenticeship was within an effective learning culture and had a clear employment structure in place (Fletcher, 2019), and as a result, their respective employers enculturated a constructivist approach to learning (Heikkinen and Lassmigg, 2015), from the outset. Whereas, for participants P6, P8, P9, and P11, their knowledge of apprenticeships improved overtime, thus, they were able to apply their understanding of apprenticeships more purposively within their occupations, which led to better outcomes; despite their employers' lack of apprenticeship knowledge.

Furthermore, for P7 and P14, because of their employers' understanding of apprenticeships, the environment they encountered in employment was one that enabled them to formalise a new professional identity through internalised meanings (Stets and Burke, 2014; Stets and Serpe, 2013), at an earlier stage of their apprenticeship compared to the other participants. In addition, P7 and P14 also more rapidly participated in 'in-group' memberships (Tajfel et al., 1979), and 'intergroup relationships' (Turner et al., 1994), that were aligned to their post-apprenticeship vision (Fuller and Unwin, 2003); thus, they experienced a change in their feelings, goals, values, motives, attitudes, and beliefs (Haslam, 2004), at an earlier point than the other remaining participants during phase three. Moreover, only participants P7 and P14 were able to fully access their 20% off-the-job entitlement and had reasonable adjustments made to their workloads from the start of their apprenticeship (Richmond, 2017).

The findings suggest that therefore participants P7 and P14 were able to establish their professional identity more swiftly than the other participants. However, unlike Fuller et al. (2015) and Heikkinen and Lassmigg (2015) notion of a dual identity, 'worker' and 'learner', for P7 and P14 they identified not as an apprentice or learner, but instead as a worker doing professional development, and even during their off-the-job learning they continued to view themselves as a worker. The findings suggest that this is because their employers worked with them to identify opportunities to develop their knowledge, skills, and behaviours linked to the occupational standard that their apprenticeship was working towards covering, thus, providing a holistic learning experience that does not separate out the working and learning elements (Parker, 2006), and instead encouraged an experimental learning experience through 'doing' and then reflection (Kolb, 2015). This was not the case for the other participants, however, in comparison to the participants that withdrew from the apprenticeship programme, for most of the remaining participants, they were

part of a positive team culture that influenced their apprenticeship journey, which increased their motivation, improvement in self-awareness and personal responsibility (Ritchie, 2011); this was despite being in an organisation that did not cultivate an effective apprenticeship learning culture.

### ***Access to high quality learning***

Out of all the participants, only P14's experience of his off-the-job learning remained positive throughout his apprenticeship journey. P14's apprenticeship experience throughout all phases was akin to Fletcher (2022) findings, which states that off-the-job learning provides apprentices with the foundation to construct a body of work-based knowledge which supports apprentices in their formation as a professional practitioner. For most remaining participants at phase three, the learning that took place through a training provider did improve, which enabled the participants to become more confident in their respective professions, and to develop on their knowledge through the transformation of their experience on-the-job (Kolb, 2015). However, for P7, she consistently raised concerns about the pedagogical practice that she encountered since phase one. During phases two and three, P7's experience of the pedagogical support provided by the training provider progressively became more inferior to the extent that it was causing P7 to become ill with stress and anxiety toward the latter stages of her apprenticeship programme, this was despite her positive experience within her occupation as an existing member of staff that became an apprentice. The findings suggest that P7 attributed this to the fact that she was coming to the end of her apprenticeship, and that her training provider was more concerned with the quantity of new apprentices than quality of the training that they provided, which was a concern raised by Fuller (2016), because of the introduction of the apprenticeship reforms.

Most of the remaining participants were frustrated by the lack of acknowledgement of their professional status in the learning content delivered by the training provider, as previously stated, this is somewhat at odds with Fuller et al. (2015) and Heikkinen and Lassmigg (2015) findings of a dual identity of apprentices being a 'worker' and 'learner', because the remaining participants during phase three wanted their status during their training not to be acknowledged as a 'learner', but as a 'worker'. This was to ensure that the knowledge, skills, and behaviours developed during their training could be assimilated/accommodated to their occupational context (Piaget, 1936 and 1957). However, for most participants during phase three, they were able to access at least some element of training that they valued, this was either through their trainer/assessor or through their attendance to training sessions. For example,

with P6, she stated that during her attendance at university she was treated as a Nurse, this supported P6 to start to formalise her professional identity (Fletcher, 2022). This was because P6's social identity was being shaped by social structural realities and intergroup relationships (Turner et al., 1994), through her university training sessions, whereas her training in her employed setting varied according to what department she was working in. The findings suggest that the quality of training the remaining participants experienced was a significant factor in determining whether the participants started to identify as the professional occupation linked to their apprenticeship programme, which aligned to the findings in Fletcher (2022) and Brockmann et al. (2021). Moreover, the findings suggest that where the participants' professional status was being recognised, they were more rapidly adapting to and assimilating various skills, procedures, and institutional norms (Parker, 2006), aligned to their post-apprenticeship professional identity (Fuller and Unwin, 2003).

Considering the experiences of all participants, including those that withdrew, the findings suggest that the initial assessment conducted by the training provider was ineffective for many participants. For some participants, their post-apprenticeship vision was not established, and for a few, such as P7, their prior learning attainment and barriers to learning were not identified. Consequentially, these participants' lived experience of their off-the-job training was negatively impacted, for example, P7's experience resonates with the findings Böhn and Deutscher (2022), which identified poor quality of training and non-identification of learning disabilities as some of the main reasons for non-completion of an apprenticeship. Moreover, similarly to those participants that withdrew from the apprenticeship programme, most participants were unsure whether there was a training plan in place, the absence of this structure provided by the training plan caused issues for these participants because the on and off-the job learning did not coherently align in any organic or necessary way (Miettinen, 2000). Only P11's and P14's lived experiences suggest that there was an apprentice, employer and training provider co-constructed training plan which was used to align on and off-the-job learning that elicited a constructivist learning pedagogy (Mills, 2011), and actively encouraged points of reflection (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015).

The quality of the training plans varied between P11 and P14, unlike P11, P14 was able to utilise the 20% off-the-job entitlement, which enabled him to fully engage with his respective training plan, therefore P11's was able to reflect through an on-going process where he was able to draw upon his past

experiences and how he had built upon that knowledge in the present (Fletcher, 2022). Whereas, for P11, he was not always able to access his 20% off-the-job entitlement due to his workload, therefore his ability to follow the training plan was limited. With exception to P11 and P14, the findings suggests that the remaining participants did not have a training plan in place, which as previously stated is a condition of the apprenticeship funding rules in England (Education Skills Funding Agency: Main Providers, 2022). Therefore, opportunities to create knowledge through the transformation of experience (Kolb, 2015) were missed, for example with P6 who stated that she was unaware that a training plan was constructed, and as a result she identified several missed opportunities to develop her knowledge, skills, and behaviours through a holistic training plan. Because of this most participants were not able to reflect on their learning, and fully benefit from the aspects of a concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984).

During phase three, some participants were able to access a form of community of practice within their off-the-job training, however in most cases the creation of such a community of practice was created by the participants, with no direction or framework provided by their respective training provider, consequentially, the level of engagement and expediency was extremely varied. For P6, and P14 they benefited from the community of practice that they established, by having a network of peers from which they could share experiences with, from inside, and outside of the formal learning environment (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Whereas, for P8 and P9, their experience of a community of practice was in the form of a message board which was not utilised by their apprenticeship peers. Conversely, for P11, the community of practice he participated in was scaffolded and encouraged by his training provider, in this instance, the members of P11's group, understood the purpose, limitations, and the terms of reference for this group, which resulted in better outcomes for P11 compared to the other participants (Fletcher, 2019). All participants during phase three acknowledged there was much to be gained from a community of practice, but because of limited direction from their respective training provider, all were experiencing various levels of worth to their apprenticeship journey. Only P14 was benefitting from crossing boundaries from the existing employer-based communities of practice, to the one that he established within the training provider (Wenger, 1998). For P6, P11 and P14 that were part of an effective community of practice within their respective training provider, they were realising the benefits of one, and as a result they

have a network of peers from which they can share ideas, challenge new ways of thinking, and learn from each other (Drury and Reicher, 2020).

For a few of the remaining participants, communication with their trainer/assessor varied, for example, in P7's lived experience, her relationship with her trainer/assessor decreased overtime, which resulted in P7 finding it difficult to complete her apprenticeship, whereas for P14, his trainer/assessor provided him with valuable timely feedback that aligned to his job, and working directly with P14's employer mentor, they acted as the system conveners (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015), or named persons (Fuller and Unwin, 2015), to facilitate the crossing of boundaries between on and off-the-job communities of practice, consequentially, P14 was achieving better outcomes than the other participants during phase three.

Overall, the findings suggest that only P14's apprenticeship journey could be described as expansive because P14's employer and training provider created a stronger and richer learning environment through co-construction of P14's apprenticeship journey (Fuller and Unwin, 2003), whereas for the other participants their apprenticeship journeys were restrictive (Fuller and Unwin, 2003).

### **Expansive Continuum Trigon (Theoretical Model)**

Because of this study, there is a requirement to build upon 'the restrictive-expansive continuum' developed by Fuller and Unwin (2003). The adaptations are required to advise employers, training providers and employees how to establish an expansive apprenticeship journey within the context of the post apprenticeship reforms. Thus, a new taxonomy, namely, 'Expansive Continuum Trigon' is proposed. At this stage, this taxonomy is a theoretical concept which requires further exploration through research to validate whether it achieves the desired outcomes. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, an ephemeral introduction to the taxonomy is provided until further examination is conducted.

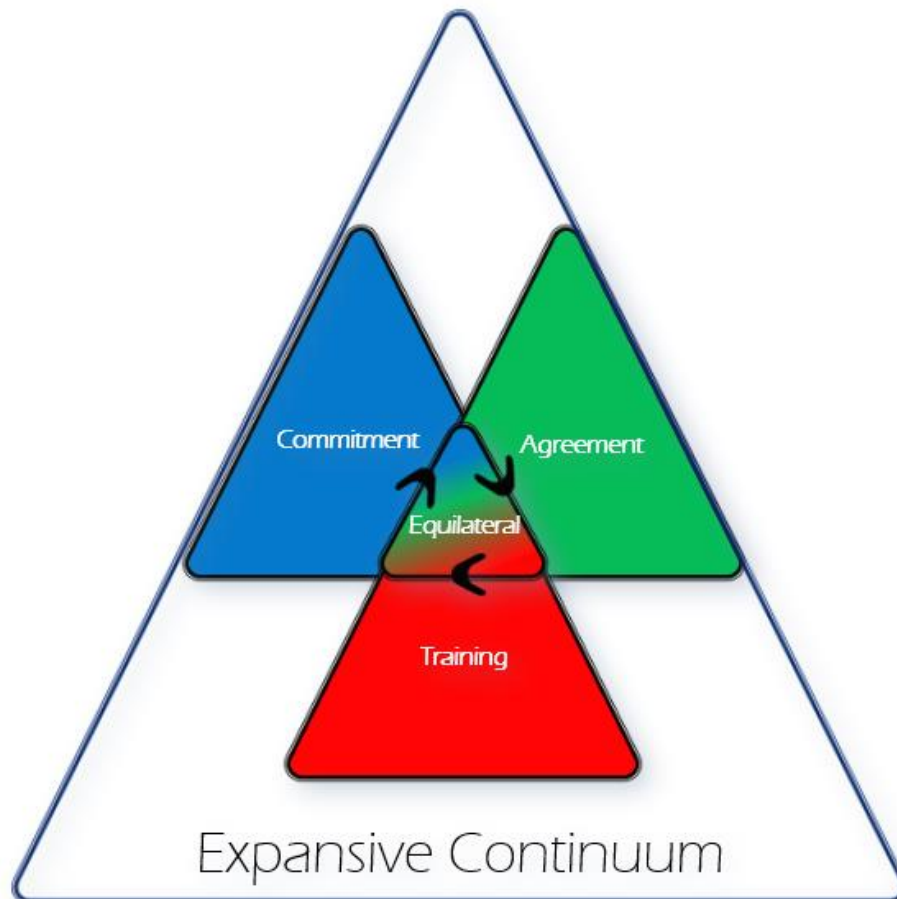


FIGURE 16: EXPANSIVE CONTINUUM TRIGON

As illustrated in figure 16, the expansive continuum trigon has been constructed using triangular components, this shape has been purposefully used to represent that an apprenticeship journey must have a shared involvement from three stakeholders, namely, the apprentice, employer, and training provider.

This taxonomy requires that all stakeholders be fully involved in the development of a shared commitment, agreement, and training plan to ensure that the approach to achieving an expansive apprenticeship journey is achieved.

Each component is introduced below:

***Shared Agreement***

A significant determining factor of whether the participants apprenticeship journey was restrictive or expansive, was a shared understanding of what the purpose of apprenticeships are for. Moreover, the detail of the constituent parts, including the statutory entitlements that an apprentice should receive, e.g., 20% off-the-job. This builds on the apprenticeship funding rules (Education Skills

Funding Agency: Main Providers, 2022) through the emphasis placed on knowledge of apprenticeships.

1. Shared understanding of the purpose of an apprenticeship, and statutory entitlements
2. Establish post-apprenticeship identity through the alignment of occupational standard to job responsibilities
3. Identification of what KSBs the apprentice needs to learn based on prior learning
4. Identify additional learning support requirements, and prior attainment
5. Agreement of support provided through the employer and training provider, including names of systems convener and trainer/assessor
6. Specify the amount of off-the-job training the apprentice is to receive, and when within the working week they can expect to use it
7. Identify communities of practice on and off-the-job, and how crossing boundaries will be facilitated
8. Agreement of training period
9. Agreed shared goal statement
10. How do these agreements support the apprentice to achieve their post-apprenticeship vision?

### ***Shared Commitment***

The findings demonstrated the requirement of ensuring that all stakeholders commitments are agreed, commonly understood, and regularly reviewed to ensure compliance. The requirement of a separate commitment statement was omitted from the apprenticeship funding rules in 2022 (Education Skills Funding Agency: Main Providers, 2022), and instead was incorporated into the training plan. The findings from this study suggest that a separate commitment statement should be required, because the inclusion of it within a training plan has proven within this study to have reduced the breadth of commitments, and adherence of them.

1. What is expected and offered by the employing organisation?
2. What is expected and offered by the systems convener from within the organisation?
3. What is expected and offered by the training provider?
4. What is expected and offered by the apprentice?
5. What is the process to resolve queries or complaints?



6. How do these commitments support the apprentice to achieve their post-apprenticeship vision?

### ***Shared Training Plan***

This builds on the funding rules compliance of a training plan (Education Skills Funding Agency: Main Providers, 2022). The findings suggest that most participants received low quality off-the-job training. Consequentially, the pedagogical practice was not differentiated to the needs of the participants, including their learning support needs, and relevance to their occupational context. The following is suggested as an approach to ensure a training plan is co-constructed to achieve an expansive apprenticeship journey.

1. What training will be provided to the systems convener to ensure they can effectively mentor and coach the apprentice on-the-job?
2. Training provider: tailored scheme of work to support apprentice to fulfil gaps in KSBs (off-the-job), and achieve English and maths levels (if required)
3. Employer: Alignment of on-the-job learning against scheme of work
4. Identify opportunities to integrate communities of learning
5. Schedule key points of reflection throughout training plan (including self and participatory reflection)
6. All to agree dates/times for progress reviews, and EPA target date
7. Apprentice: review training plan against learning needs
8. How does this training plan support the apprentice to achieve their post-apprenticeship vision?

### ***Expansive Continuum (Equilateral)***

From the knowledge acquired from this study, a new taxonomy, namely the expansive continuum trigon is introduced. This is an adaption of the 'expansive-continuum' as cited in Fuller and Unwin (2003). The adaptations are to consider the needs of existing employees that become an apprentice during their contract of employment. Fuller and Unwin (2003) suggests the apprentice's worker and learner status should be recognised. This is prudent for school and college leavers as they make the transition from studying full-time education through to a productive worker. However, in the case of existing staff members, they have already made the transition to worker, and the findings of this study suggest that existing employees achieve better outcomes if their status of worker is recognised on and off-the-job; the most successful participants were those that

identified as a worker doing professional development. Considering this, as well as recognising that the findings suggest that an expansive apprenticeship journey can only be achieved if social identity, situated and experiential learning intrinsically link, the following is suggested to classify the expansive continuum.

1. Organisation apprenticeship strategy creates a cultural of learning
2. Explicit institutional recognition of, and support for, apprentices, with a clearly defined identity that integrates both the on and off-job with equal status
3. The post apprenticeship vision supports the employee and organisation to achieve their collective shared goal
4. On and off-the-job learning is aligned so opportunities through 'being' and 'doing' post-apprenticeship identity are realised
5. Breadth: access to learning fostered by cross-company experiences built into programme
6. Named individual (system convener) acts as dedicated support to apprentices
7. Participation in multiple communities of practice on and off-the-job through employment and training provider respectively
8. Crossing boundaries is effective in weaving between communities of practice
9. Primary community of practice has shared participative memory;' cultural inheritance of apprenticeships
10. Access to range of qualifications including knowledge-based vocational qualifications, including English and maths (if required)
11. High quality pedagogy received from off-the-job learning that removes barriers to learning
12. Regular visits from trainer/assessor to the apprentice within their place of work, so pedagogical practice is differentiated to their context
13. Planned time off-the-job including for training provider attendance and for reflection
14. Apprenticeship design that is innately based on experiential learning, recognises the apprentice's profession, and a training plan that supports an individual to develop and try out current ideas, take risks, and provokes reflection

### **Expansive Continuum Trigon: Verification**

Each component should be reviewed against the expansive continuum (equilateral) on at least a quarterly basis, this is to ensure that commitments are being upheld, and that changes in an individual's lived experiences from within and outside of the apprenticeship are accommodated across all components, and importantly, are collectively understood and agreed to.

Without continuous adherence of a shared agreement, commitments, and training plan, the links between social identity, situated and experiential learning will become unorganised, and lose their meaning (Fuller and Unwin, 2003; Mills, 2011). The expansive continuum (equilateral) is verified once the employer, training provider and apprentice are in continuous agreement that each component of the expansive continuum trigon are effective in achieving an expansive apprenticeship journey. Finally, this process ensures that the employer and employees shared goals and post-apprenticeship vision (Fuller and Unwin, 2003), remains a common endeavour (Eckert, 2006), and that the employees can rapidly formalise their new identity standard aligned to their apprenticeship occupational standard (Stets and Trettevik, 2014).

The next chapter focuses on the contribution of knowledge through responding to the research questions aligned to this study.

## **Chapter Seven Conclusion**

This closing chapter concludes the study, and using the empirical findings and associated discussions, which directly addresses each of the research questions (see chapter 3.5), which are encapsulated using 'the restrictive-expansive continuum,' as suggested by Fuller and Unwin (2003). As identified from the results of this study, one participant's lived experience could be defined as expansive, the other participants' apprenticeship journeys were restrictive, thus, emphasising the importance in its instigation. The contribution to knowledge will support the UK Government, employers, and training providers to develop an expansive apprenticeship experience for all apprentices and will especially support existing staff members that enrol to an apprenticeship programme during their contract of employment. Furthermore, the contribution to knowledge will also support apprentices to increase their awareness of what they should expect from an expansive apprenticeship journey. The responses to each of the following research questions are addressed within the context of the findings from this study, and therefore are relevant to the characteristics of the participants. The chapter concludes with a summary of contributions, limitations of study, recommendations, and the researcher's reflection.

### **7.1 Do employees' preconceptions of an apprenticeship impact on their behaviour and social identity when they become an apprentice within their organisation?**

#### ***a. Do employees' perceptions of their social identity change during the apprenticeship?***

Employees initially had negative preconceptions of apprenticeships which were shaped not by apprenticeship policy, but instead were influenced by historical apprenticeship stereotypes, past experiences of working within an organisation that employed apprentices, and through discussions with others (Brockmann and Laurie, 2016). Consequentially, employees' initial perceptions were that an apprenticeship is for: 'younger people,' (Fuller et al., 2015), 'non-academic' (Brockmann and Laurie, 2016), and 'junior positions' (Leonard et al., 2017) within an organisation. These perceptions are re-affirmed through self-reflected appraisal (Srivastava, 2012), if an apprenticeship programme is restrictive (Fuller and Unwin, 2003; Fuller et al., 2015), especially where there is a lack of a positive learning culture within an organisation and a general misunderstanding of the purpose of apprenticeships (Heikkinen and Lassmigg, 2015; Fuller and Unwin, 2015). Consequentially, employees that become

apprentices during a contract of employment experience negativity from within their occupation because of being viewed by their colleagues as belonging to an apprenticeship 'outgroup,' (Tajfel et al., 1979). Therefore, employees experience negative perceptual inputs (Burke and Stets, 2009), from their colleagues that have unchallenged negative perceptions of apprenticeships. In these circumstances, as stated in Fuller et al. (2015), these employees struggle with the concept of being labelled as an apprentice, thus, their behaviours and social identity is negatively impacted, as identified through the findings. Due to the increased workload from studying an apprenticeship, employees become frustrated with the lack of acknowledgement of their apprentice/learner status within their occupation (Heikkinen and Lassmigg, 2015; Fuller et al., 2015); this is despite the employees' reluctance to be acknowledged as an apprentice (Willis, 1977; Archer and Yamashita, 2003; Fuller et al., 2015). Moreover, the findings suggest that where an apprenticeship programme is restrictive for existing employees that become an apprentice, they are unable to access their legal entitlement to 20% off-the-job and are required to fulfil the requirements of a fulltime role within the remaining 80% on-the-job (Richmond, 2017). In addition, as also identified in Brockmann et al. (2021) for non-STEM related occupations, employees are classed as productive workers than apprentices, and the employer views the learning aspects of the apprenticeship programme as the sole responsibility of the training provider. This results in a misalignment of the employees' on and off-the-job lived experiences, thus, opportunities for experiential and situated learning are limited because of a lack of shared commitment and structure by an employer and training provider (Fletcher, 2019; Kolb, 2015; Lave and Wenger, 1991), that supports employees to have a holistic learning experience (Parker, 2006).

As stated by Haslam (2004) an organisation is a social structure and changes an individual's feelings, goals, values, motives, attitudes, and beliefs. Thus, because of the lack of a shared training commitment between an employer and training provider, employees become unclear on how their apprenticeship journey contributes to the organisational goals etc. This is especially impactful for existing employees that become an apprentice, as they have previously defined themselves psychologically in relation to and within this social structure, thus have already assimilated institutional norms, where they understood their role within the organisation (Katz and Kahn, 1966; Haslam, 2004). Consequentially, employees experience identity overlap (McCall and Simmons, 1978), and instead of formalising a new identity aligned to their post-apprenticeship vision (Fuller and Unwin, 2003), their identity has hierarchies of prominence, thus, they

experience multiple versions of their social identity (McCall and Simmons, 1978), in an attempt to achieve positive self-reflected appraisal (Gecas and Burke, 1995), and to remain part of their previously established 'in-group' membership (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Furthermore, due to a lack of a shared apprenticeship understanding and commitment, employers impose an identity on the employee to fill gaps in the business because of them becoming an apprentice (Owens, Robinson, and Smith-Lovin, 2010). As suggested by Stets (2018), employees that have identity overlap will experience disorganised responses in their behaviours, especially as they are unclear of their identity standard (Burke and Stets, 2009). This coupled with limited or no access to their off-the-job entitlement, misalignment of on and off-the-job training, negative perceptual inputs from being viewed as belonging to an apprenticeship 'outgroup,' and their own negative preconceptions of apprenticeships, elicits negative emotions and behaviours from the employee (Tajfel et al., 1979). Inevitably, employees become disengaged in their apprenticeship programme, less productive, and experience elevated levels of stress and anxiety from having to achieve an apprenticeship programme, alongside a fulltime job role.

Conversely, the findings from this study demonstrate that employees' perceptions of apprenticeships rapidly improve when their employer has an effective apprenticeship strategy in place that promotes an organisational social structure that cultivates a progressive learning environment (Haslam, 2004). In addition, and equally as imperative, the employee receives high quality pedagogical support and training; an initial needs analysis that identifies the employee's prior attainment, barriers to learning, and post-apprenticeship vision (Fuller and Unwin, 2003), through the training provider and in conjunction with the employee and employer (Guile and Young, 1999; Hackel, Coppin, Wohl, and Van Bavel, 2018). In this situation, and on condition that the employer and training provider have a shared commitment and understanding of their collective training approach and respective commitments, a training plan is co-constructed through discussions between the employee, employer, and training provider (Fletcher, 2019). This ensures that both on and off-the-job learning are aligned, and that the employee's individual learning needs, and post apprenticeship vision are understood and innately encompassed (Fuller and Unwin, 2003; Parker, 2006; Kolb, 2015; Lave and Wenger, 1991). Through this co-constructed training plan, opportunities to provide an experiential learning experience are realised, therefore, employees can access their 20% off-the-job entitlement and have planned points of reflection where they are able to develop on their off-the-job knowledge through the transformation of this through their

on-the-job experience (Dewey, 1963; Kolb, 2015). Employees' workloads and targets are adjusted accordingly, and their objectives are focussed on organisational goals aligned to the occupational standard associated to the apprenticeship programme (Statt, 1994). Unlike Heikkinen and Lassmigg (2015) and Fuller et al. (2015) notion of a dual identity of 'worker' and 'learner', employees start to formalise a social identity aligned to the apprenticeship occupational standard, e.g., Digital Marketer, Nurse and so forth. Employees are recognised for having this status on and off-the-job, thus they more rapidly establish occupational and institutional norms associated to this post-apprenticeship vision (Katz and Kahn, 1966; Haslam, 2004; Fuller and Unwin, 2003), from 'being' and 'doing' the occupation associated to their apprenticeship (Stets and Burke, 2000). Unlike, school and college leavers that need to transform from a learner to a worker over time (Heikkinen and Lassmigg, 2015; Fuller and Unwin, 2003), existing staff members have already made this transition because of their prior experiences, therefore, for an expansive apprenticeship journey to be realised, employees need to establish an identity standard (Stets and Trettevik, 2014) in which they and their colleagues understand (LaTendresse, 2000; Eckert, 2006; Fuller and Unwin, 2003; Fuller et al., 2015), and one that contributes to the organisational goals etc. As a result, employees receive positive perceptual inputs (Burke and Stets, 2009), which are verified through positive self-reflected appraisal (Gecas and Burke, 1995; Srivastava, 2012).

This is further supported through a systems convener or named person within the organisation that identifies opportunities for the employee to cross boundaries between on and off-the-job communities of practice, which benefits the employee to weave between both in-group memberships (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015; Fuller and Unwin, 2003), without compromising existing intergroup relationships (Turner et al., 1994). Hence, employees' behaviours remain positive, their perceptions of apprenticeships rapidly improve, and they start to formalise their social identity aligned to their post-apprenticeship vision (Fuller and Unwin, 2003). Consequentially, when an apprenticeship journey is expansive, employees, employers and training providers achieve better outcomes. Finally, there is evidence to suggest that employees may have elements of an expansive apprenticeship journey during their on-the-job but have a restrictive off-the-job experience; due to inferior quality pedagogical support and training received through a training provider (Fuller, 2016; Gambin and Hogarth, 2016; Power, 2019; Böhn and Deutscher, 2022; Cedefop, 2020). The opposite is also possible, and in both situations the apprenticeship journey

will still be restrictive, and therefore, employees will be impacted negatively to some degree, and consequentially, but to a lesser extent if the restrictive experience is limited to the training provider, they will elicit negative emotions, behaviours, and take longer to formalise an identity aligned to the occupational standard associated with the apprenticeship programme (Hackel, Coppin, Wohl, and Van Bavel, 2018). Furthermore, employees' perceptions of apprenticeships do improve overtime, but not as rapidly as those who have an expansive apprenticeship journey.

## **7.2 Does becoming an apprentice impact on pre-existing communities of practice or are new communities of practice formed?**

The findings suggest that employees that are within a restrictive apprenticeship either have limited or no access to pre-existing and new communities of practice. Moreover, their employers have not enculturated organisational learning in the form of a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1999). Instead, participation in existing groups within their respective occupations is focussed on the day-to-day business operations rather than lessons learnt or sharing of good practice. The findings do suggest that during these group discussions, employees will assimilate norms, behaviours, values, relationships, and beliefs (Newman, 1987), some of which provide some benefit to the employees' apprenticeship journey, whereas some will reinforce the negativity associated to being an apprentice, that is verified through self-reflected appraisal (Gecas and Burke, 1995; Srivastava, 2012).

The positive occurrences experienced within pre-existing communities of practice are ad-hoc and are not set within a clear structure that aligns against the employees' apprenticeship on and off-the-job learning, in a coherent or meaningful manner (Fuller and Unwin, 2003; Mills, 2011). In addition, as previously discussed, the employees do not have an identity standard (Burke and Stets, 2009), thus, they are unclear on how their role as an apprentice contributes to the organisation's goals (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Consequentially, during their participation within pre-existing communities of practice in their occupation, employees do not have a shared sense of belonging with their colleagues (Statt, 1994; LaTendresse, 2000; Haslam, 2004); this can result in negative emotions and behaviours from the employee and their colleagues (Tajfel et al., 1979; Turner et al., 1994). Employees also have limited or no access to communities of practice that are established by the training provider. In some cases, employees will attempt to establish their own communities of practice with their apprenticeship peers, however without the



training providers' pedagogical guidance and structure, the level of engagement and usefulness is varied (Wenger, 1998; Hackel, Coppin, Wohl, and Van Bavel, 2018), and the benefits of a community of practice are not realised by the employees, such as participatory reflection; assimilation of various skills; and sharing good practice with a network of peers. Unlike employees that experience a restrictive apprenticeship journey those that are within the expansive continuum (Fuller and Unwin, 2003) their respective employer mentor, and trainer/assessor become system conveners (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015) or named persons (Fuller and Unwin, 2015), that identify pre-existing communities of practice, and establish new communities for the employee to participate in. Due to the employees' post-apprenticeship vision (Fuller and Unwin, 2003), they are clear on how their goal of achieving their apprenticeship programme aligns to the ventures of the organisation, colleagues, and apprentice peers. Because of this, employees can cross-boundaries between on and off-the-job communities of practice, without the tensions that result from being viewed as belonging to an apprenticeship 'out-group,' (Tajfel et al., 1979).

Consequentially, employees; their colleagues; and apprentice peers; benefit from a community (Eckert, 2006), that improves strategy; introduce new lines of service; solve problems quickly and transfer best practices; and facilitates participatory reflection (Wenger and Snyder, 2000, Wenger et al., 2002).

Finally, a few employees experience that they either have a positive community of practice either in their occupation or through their respective training provider, however where this only exists in either on or off-the-job learning, or when there is no facilitation of crossing-boundaries between communities of practice, then their apprenticeship journey remains restrictive. This is because participation in communities of practice on and off-the-job enable the employees to have a shared domain of interest with new ways of conceptualising and studying through co-construction and shared practice, where members build professional relationships to learn from each other in a community. Furthermore, as stated by Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015), there is much to be gained from participation in multiple communities of practice, such as bringing together multiple voices that reflect the structure of the landscape (Drury and Reicher, 2020), without which the apprenticeship journey remains restrictive.

### **7.3 Do the apprentices believe that experiential learning is being used to support them to make progress?**

The findings conclude that with exception to a few employees that took part within this study, that experiential learning is not fully incorporated into the employees' apprenticeship journey. Albeit, because of the constituent components of an apprenticeship being made up of learning on and off-the-job, employees that become apprentices will encounter elements of experiential learning. This is due to learning new knowledge from off-the-job, which is then applied in their occupation through the transformation of experience (Kolb, 2015). However, for a few employees it becomes difficult to achieve this basic level of experiential learning due to the lack of alignment of their apprenticeship programme with their occupation (Ritchie, 2011; Fletcher, 2019). For employees where there is alignment of their apprenticeship programme with their respective job roles, then the extent to which experiential learning is realised is highly dependent on the features of any specific organisational context (Turner and Haslam, 2001). Moreover, how effective their employer and training provider have been in creating an apprenticeship programme that is viewed as expansive (Fuller and Unwin, 2003).

Where an employee is experiencing an apprenticeship journey that is expansive, then experiential learning is innately being used as a scaffold in which their knowledge is constructed through the on and off-the-job learning experience (Dewey, 1963). In this case, through a co-constructed training plan (Fuller and Unwin, 2003; Mills, 2011), employees can involve themselves fully and openly without the fear of bias received through 'out-group' tensions (Tajfel et al., 1979), and those received through negative perceptual outputs from within their occupation because of being an apprentice (Burke and Stets, 2009). Moreover, due to the alignment of on and off-the-job learning, opportunities to transform their knowledge through application within their occupational context are not missed, and from which they can reflect on and observe how their experiences impact on their work-related outcomes. Through scheduled points of reflection and regular progress reviews with their employer mentor and trainer/assessor, employees can use their experience to create innovative ideas that accelerate their progress on the apprenticeship programme.

Finally, these ideas are then used within their occupation that benefits not only the employee, but also their employer, as the employee can use these ideas to solve problems, make decisions, and increase their contribution of achieving organisational goals. As also stated in the findings identified in Ritchie (2011),

through this level of engagement with experiential learning, employee's experience an increase in motivation, improvement in self-awareness and personal responsibility.

Conversely, for employees that have elements of or a total restrictive apprenticeship journey, the engagement and outcomes are varied, but will result in fewer positive outcomes compared to those who are within an expansive apprenticeship journey. The employees within scope of a restrictive continuum take longer to assimilate and accommodate knowledge derived from on and off-the-job learning (Piaget, 1936; Piaget, 1957). This is because of the lack of alignment and structure between the learning that takes place within the training provider with what is happening within their occupation; thus, the perturbation and disequilibrium of their schema is deferred (Von Glasersfeld, 1995). Furthermore, they experience more barriers to learning, because their learning needs and styles have not been accounted for either as part of an initial needs analysis or through identification of their prevalent learning styles that impacts on their cognitive learning (Kolb, 1976; Kolb, 1984). Consequentially, due to the misalignment of the employers' occupations to their respective off-the-job learning (Hackel, Coppin, Wohl, and Van Bavel, 2018); limited access to communities of practice and their 20% off-the-job entitlement; and restricted opportunities to reflect on their apprenticeship journey holistically (Parker, 2006); neither the employer nor employee are benefitting from an experiential learning experience (Ritchie, 2011).

#### **7.4 Does the apprentices' social identity, situated and experiential learning interlink, if so, how?**

Where employees are part of an expansive apprenticeship journey then the components of social identity, situated and experiential learning intrinsically link. For example, as existing staff members, they previously understood their identity standard (Stets and Trettevik, 2014), from their previous role within the organisation. However, when becoming an apprentice, employees are aspiring to achieve their post-apprenticeship vision and formalise a new identity aligned with the occupation associated with their apprenticeship (Katz and Kahn, 1966; Haslam, 2004; Fuller and Unwin, 2003). This is achieved through participation in communities of practice that support the employees to assimilate new skills, norms, values, and beliefs akin to the apprenticeship programme (Wenger and Snyder, 2000; Wenger et al., 2002; Eckert, 2006), without which an employee will experience multiple versions of their social identity (McCall and Simmons, 1978), to achieve positive self-reflected appraisal (Gecas and Burke, 1995) of

their social identity. This elicits negative emotions and behaviours, especially when an employee loses a shared sense of belonging with their colleagues (Statt, 1994; LaTendresse, 2000; Haslam, 2004). Experiential learning is used as the scaffold in which encompasses social identity and situated learning theory within a cycle of reflection (Kolb, 2015). This ensures that an employee receives a holistic learning experience (Parker, 2006), and one that requires reflection (Dewey, 1963; Kolb, 2015), which is achieved through self-reflection, and through participatory reflection (Wenger and Snyder, 2000, Wenger et al., 2002), within the established communities of practice. Collectively, all components rely upon full consideration of the other to successfully support employees to establish their post apprenticeship identity standard (Fuller and Unwin, 2003), develop their social identity through intergroup relationships (Turner et al., 1994), and through the process of learning, the application of new knowledge and continuous reflection, their schema is modified through perturbation and disequilibrium (Kolb, 2015).

Therefore, to interlink social identity, situated and experiential learning in a meaningful way (Fuller and Unwin, 2003; Mills, 2011), it requires a co-constructed training plan to encapsulate, without preference, all theories. The findings suggests that an expansive apprenticeship experience cannot be achieved unless all theoretical concepts are fully incorporated within the apprenticeship journey. Moreover, the absence of one component results in a restrictive apprenticeship experience that either does not achieve the employee's post apprenticeship vision or at the very least hinders their formalisation of a new identity standard aligned to this (Fuller and Unwin, 2003; Stets and Trettevik, 2014).

Finally, whilst it is prudent for all components to be captured within a training plan, this alone will not guarantee a continuous expansive apprenticeship journey. The findings suggest that there is a requirement for the training plan to be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that commitments are being upheld, and that changes in an individual's lived experiences from within and outside of the apprenticeship are accommodated.

## Summary of Contribution to Knowledge

From completion of this study, the following contributions to knowledge are identified:

1. Existing employees' preconceptions of who apprenticeships are for, include: 'young people,' junior positions, and vocational occupations. When employees are making progress towards their post-apprenticeship vision, their perception of apprenticeships improves over time. Conversely, for employees that have an unclear post-apprenticeship vision their preconceptions are verified, especially where there is a lack of a positive learning culture within an organisation. In addition, due to an unclear identity standard, employees elicit negative emotions and behaviours. Furthermore, where an organisation has a poor learning culture, employees experience negativity from within their occupation because of being viewed by their colleagues as belonging to an apprenticeship 'outgroup'.
2. Employees and their respective employers generally do not understand what constitutes an apprenticeship, and therefore, are unclear of their commitments as apprentices and employers in accordance with the apprenticeship funding rules. Consequentially, most employees cannot access their legal entitlement of 20% off-the-job training, nor are their workloads and targets adjusted.
3. Not in all circumstances are apprenticeships being used for a productive job role. Moreover, these employees' occupations do not align to the knowledge, skills, and behaviours of the occupational standard associated to their apprenticeship programme, thus, their likelihood of withdrawal increases. In this situation, employees were primarily fully workers than learners, thus employers viewed the apprenticeship as the sole responsibility of the training provider.
4. Employees that choose to become an apprentice with a clear sense of purpose, for career progression, and to achieve a personal longstanding ambition are more resilient to a restrictive apprenticeship journey and are likely to achieve. Conversely, employees that do not have a clear identity standard are unclear on how their role as an apprentice contributes to the organisational goals. Consequentially, during their participation within

pre-existing group memberships in their occupation, they do not have a shared sense of belonging with their colleagues.

5. Employees achieve better outcomes if their occupational status is acknowledged on and off-the-job, this supported employees to formalise their identity standard, and ensured that the knowledge, skills, and behaviours developed during their training could be assimilated/accommodated to their occupational context. The opposite was also true where there was not a post-apprenticeship vision, and a shared understanding and commitment between the employer, training provider, and apprentice; thus, in this situation, employees wanted their 'learner' status to be more widely recognised.
6. Communities of practice were not a key feature of most organisations, and in training settings the creation of a community of practice was by the employees, with no direction or framework provided by their respective training provider. Consequentially, the level of engagement and expediency was extremely varied. Where employees have a positive community of practice either in their occupation or through their respective training provider, then their apprenticeship journey remains restrictive because the benefits of a range of perspectives are not realised from on and off-the-job experiences, nor is the facilitation of crossing-boundaries made possible.
7. Most participants expressed dissatisfaction with the level of education and training they received because it was not differentiated according to the context in which they worked nor was it personalised to meet their individual learning needs. Where situated and experiential learning occurs, employees achieve better outcomes, and can reflect through self-reflection, and participatory reflection, where this is not the case, the apprenticeship journey is restrictive.
8. For an expansive apprenticeship journey to be achieved, it requires social identity, situated and experiential learning to interlink in a meaningful way through a co-constructed training plan. The absence of one component results in a restrictive apprenticeship experience that either does not achieve the employee's post apprenticeship vision or hinders their formalisation of a new identity standard.

9. As previously discussed earlier within this chapter, the theoretical contribution of this study demonstrates the importance of systematically linking social identity, situated and experiential learning in a meaningful way (Fuller and Unwin, 2003; Mills, 2011) to achieve an expansive apprenticeship experience. Moreover, that each theoretical concept requires parity; thus, the absence of one component results in a restrictive apprenticeship lived experience. The findings of this study also share some commonality with Collins et al. (1987, 1988) who identified a theoretical concept, namely, 'Cognitive Apprenticeships', which is a theory that identifies and links tacit processes such as: modelling, coaching, scaffolding, articulation, reflection, and exploration. This philosophy is akin to Kolb's (2015) experiential learning theory through the requirement of a process of learning that entails the application of new knowledge and continuous reflection. Similarly, because cognitive apprenticeship theory assumes that people learn from one another, this links well to situated learning, more directly, communities of practice, through the assimilation of new skills, norms, values, and beliefs from group participation (Wenger and Snyder, 2000; Wenger et al., 2002; Eckert, 2006). Finally, the findings of this study demonstrate the importance of a co-constructed training plan to encapsulate, without preference, an existing staff member's social identity, situated and experiential learning journey.

The process of developing this training plan resonates with Bloom's et al. (1956) 'Bloom's taxonomy' theory which identifies the importance of an individualised educational plan that is designed around the needs of the individual learner. Therefore, a training plan should recognise an existing staff member's current knowledge, skills, and behaviours against Bloom's et al. (1956) three learning domains: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. Furthermore, that a training plan should be differentiated to account for an existing staff member's prior-learning and experiences that align to their post apprenticeship vision; which will be more advanced compared to a School/College leaver (Fuller and Unwin, 2003). Consequentially, it is prudent that a training plan recognises that an existing staff member's hierarchy of learning within each domain will need to be differentiated according to their identity standard (Stets and Trettevik, 2014), and schema (Krathwohl, 2002) this will support the process of assimilating and accommodating new knowledge (Piaget,

1932; McCray, 2007) aligned to the apprenticeship occupational standard being studied by an existing staff member.

### **Limitations of Study**

Three participants withdrew from their apprenticeship programme which narrowed the reach of the findings. However, these participants did not withdraw from the study so their reasonings for leaving their apprenticeship programme provided further empirical data that informed the recommendations. Compared to the participants that withdrew, evidently the remaining participants were more positive about their apprenticeship journey which impacted on the data collection during the latter phases. In addition, because this longitudinal study was carried out over a twelve-month duration not all the participants had passed through the apprenticeship gateway, thus, the entirety of their lived experience was not captured.

Due to the paucity of previous studies that focussed on the lived experiences of existing employees that became an apprentice, it was difficult to directly compare the findings with other studies. In addition, as established in this study, existing employees that enrol on an apprenticeship programme are already experiencing prominent levels of workload and intensity from having to work fulltime and complete an apprenticeship. Whilst all necessary mitigations were put in place to avoid overburdening the participants, this remained a challenge. Consequentially, this study may have unintentionally added to their existing pressures, therefore may have amplified the issues they were facing during their lived experiences. Finally, the proposed taxonomy, namely, 'the expansive continuum trigon' has not been validated as this was not the focus of this study but was developed as an outcome of the knowledge gained.

### **Recommendations**

The following are the recommendations resulting in completion of this study:

UK Government:

- A Government backed targeted campaign is required that raises awareness of apprenticeships with employers to challenge existing misconceptions and the purpose of apprenticeships. This is especially prudent considering that apprenticeships will significantly support devolved areas to level-up through the creation of local skills improvement plans



- The audit and compliance to the apprenticeship funding rules requires more rigour to avoid apprenticeships from being misused
- The Department for Education should reinstate the inclusion of a detailed commitment statement as a requirement within the apprenticeship funding rules, and the condition for this to be reviewed at least in line with progress reviews to ensure that it is still fit for purpose
- Ofsted inspections should utilise a form of restrictive-expansive continuum as suggested by Fuller and Unwin (2003) to support the formation of their judgements, and areas for improvement

#### Employers, Employees, and Training Providers:

- Once validated through further research, training providers, employers, and apprentices should utilise the proposed expansive continuum trigon taxonomy to structure an apprenticeship programme
- Employers would benefit from a toolkit to support them to create an expansive apprenticeship environment and culture

#### Further Research:

- More research is required more widely to increase apprenticeship knowledge, especially post apprenticeship reforms, including studies using different methods of data collection, analysis, and sample sizes
- For future studies, it is recommended that researchers further consider how their study may palliate the unintentional additional workload that is created for apprentices
- Further development and testing of the expansive continuum trigon taxonomy is required, and once validated, a toolkit should be created to support employers to create an expansive apprenticeship culture within their organisation.

## **Researcher's Reflection**

This study has developed the researcher's academic credibility through extensive reading, and engagement of several theoretical concepts and explorations. Moreover, it has developed his academic writing, data analytical skills, and level of criticality. In addition, it has transformed his research motivation from a starting point of having limited interest to one that is full of enthusiasm and a desire to discover more. As a direct consequence of this study, the researcher has several publications and has spoken at conferences and received numerous requests to share the knowledge gained from this study. Moreover, this study has improved his own pedagogical practice, consequentially, he has achieved Chartered Teacher status from the Chartered College of Teaching and is now a Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (Advanced HE).

To conclude, the researcher would encourage all scholars to use the findings within this study as a basis from which knowledge can be further developed and challenged. Finally, the researcher would like to express his gratitude to the scholars referenced within this thesis for their epistemologically based sources of knowledge, and to all the participants for their involvement in this study, and to the support he received from his supervisors and family.

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## **Appendices**

Appendix One: Ethical Clearance Approval and Documentation

Appendix Two: Focus Group Schedules

Appendix Three: Padlet

Appendix Four: Pilot Study: Semi-Structured Questions

Appendix Five: Pilot Study: Research Materials

Appendix Six: Pilot Study: Findings

# Appendix One: Ethical Clearance Approval and Documentation

**NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY**

**SCHOOLS OF BUSINESS, LAW AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**APPLICATION FORM FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL OF A RESEARCH PROJECT – 2020-21**

**For use by members of academic staff and postgraduate research students**

**PLEASE NOTE THAT IT NORMALLY TAKES BETWEEN 3-6 WEEKS TO PROCESS APPLICATIONS, DEPENDING ON WHETHER THE APPLICATION NEEDS TO GO TO A FULL MEETING OF BLSS REC (PLEASE SEE GUIDANCE NOTE: BLSS/Ethics 01 – PAGE 6). IF YOU ARE ASKED TO REVISE YOUR APPLICATION, IT MAY TAKE LONGER.**

## **Who should use this form?**

This form is for use by academic staff and research degree students in the Schools of Business, Law and Social Sciences. If you are a student on a taught masters or undergraduate programme, you should follow the procedure laid down by your School REC.

If you are a PhD student, you should normally have received project approval before you apply for ethical approval. If there is a problem with this seek advice from your PhD supervisor.

Please note, that if following your application for project approval you find that you need to revise your research plans such that this ethics application no longer covers all aspects of your intended project, you will need to submit a revised application for ethical approval.

## **Can I begin work before the project is ethically approved?**

If your project requires ethical approval (see overleaf and Section 1) you **must not** undertake primary data collection until a favourable ethical opinion is received from the BLSS Schools Research Ethics Committee or from an external REC. Collecting primary data in the absence of ethical approval, or in the face of an adverse ethical opinion, may constitute a disciplinary offence.

If, after receiving ethical approval, factors beyond your control change your project such that the information provided in this form no longer holds, the approval will automatically become void, and you should re-apply for ethical approval.

## **Is there any help available to complete this form?**

Yes. Guidance on filling in this form can be found in Guidance Note BLSS/Ethics 01. If you are a member of staff you can find the guidance document on the research SharePoint site [here](#). If you are a PhD or Professional Doctorate student please click this [link](#) which will take you to NOW, and then follow this pathway to access the form: NOW Homepage > Student Communities > NTU Doctoral School > Content > Ethics Guidance. Professional doctorate students may also find guidance in their course learning rooms.

In this site, you will also find documents dealing with specific issues in research ethics, and some examples of participant information sheets and consent forms.

Further advice is available through Research Operations. Please email [annabel.cali@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:annabel.cali@ntu.ac.uk).

**Please note that any subsequent amendments to approved projects need to be re-submitted to BLSS REC for further consideration. Application forms and associated documentation, including issuance of approval, will be retained indefinitely. No research or personal data will be retained, with the exception of contact details of researchers.**

**Please make sure that you complete the Declaration at the end of the form.**

**Postgraduate research students must ask their Director of Studies/Lead Supervisor to countersign the form before it is submitted. Forms submitted without countersignatures will be returned.**

### Completing the Form

#### Which sections should I complete?

Different sections of this form should be completed for different kinds of projects:

<b>If your project involves:</b>	
Desk-research only, using only secondary or published sources	See Section 1.
An application to an external research ethics committee (for example, those relating to research in the NHS)	Complete Sections 1-4.
Collection and/or analysis of primary, unpublished data from, or about, identifiable, living human beings (either in laboratory or in non-laboratory settings)	Complete Sections 1-7.  Please also complete the checklists in Sections 8-14 and provide information, as requested, if any of the checks are positive.
Collection and/or analysis of data about the behaviour of human beings, in situations where they might reasonably expect their behaviour not to be observed or recorded	
Collection and/or analysis of primary, unpublished data from, or about people who have recently died	
Collection and/or analysis of primary, unpublished data from, or about, existing agencies or organisations	
Investigation of wildlife in its natural habitat	Complete Sections 1-5 and 15.
Research with human tissues or body fluids	Do not complete this form. Please contact your School Associate Dean for Research to discuss alternative arrangements for ethical review.
Research with animals, other than in their natural settings.	Do not complete this form. Please contact your School Associate Dean for Research to discuss alternative arrangements for ethical review.

Please type or write legibly in dark ink. You are asked to keep your answers as brief as possible, but you should provide sufficient detail for members of the Research Ethics Committee to form a view on the ethics of your proposed research. Where it is necessary, you may use up to one continuation sheet for each section of the form.

#### Submitting the form

Email your application to:

Annabel Cali

Research Operations

Arkwright Room B113

Email: [annabel.cali@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:annabel.cali@ntu.ac.uk)

**1 Does this project need ethical approval?**

	Yes	No
Does the project involve collecting and/or analysing primary or unpublished data from, or about, living human beings?	X	
Does it involve collecting and/or analysing primary or unpublished data about people who have recently died, other than data that is already in the public domain?		X
Does it involve collecting and/or analysing primary or unpublished data about or from organisations or agencies of any kind, other than data that is already in the public domain?		X
Does it involve research with non-human vertebrates in their natural settings or behavioural work involving invertebrate species not covered by the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986*?  *The Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 was amended in 1993. As a result, the common octopus ( <i>octopus vulgaris</i> ), as an invertebrate species, is now covered by the act.		X
Does the project involve any of the following activities:  1) Access to websites normally prohibited on university servers, for example pornography or sites of organisations proscribed by the UK Government. 2) Investigation into extremism or radicalisation. 3) Accessing and using data of a potentially damaging nature which has been obtained from a source which may not have the requisite authority to provide it. Here, potentially damaging can mean anything from information on cases of domestic abuse to data on international spy networks. In case of uncertainty, please consult Research Operations or your School Associate Dean for Research. 4) The acquisition of security clearances, including the Official Secrets Act.  Hereinafter referred to as ' <b>Special Risk Research</b> '.		X

**FOR STAFF ONLY:** If you have answered NO to all the questions above, you do not need to submit your project for ethical approval.

**FOR PhD/PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE STUDENTS ONLY:** If you have answered NO to all the questions above, please complete the section below.

Name: Brendan Coulson
School: Social Sciences
Name of Director of Studies: Dr Rowena Hill

Signed  (Student)

Date\_ 30/02/21

I have read this form, and confirm that, due to the nature of the research this project does not require the approval of a research ethics committee.

Countersigned R.Hill (Director of Studies)

Date 28/04/21

If the answer to any of the above questions is Yes, please proceed to Section 2 below

If you have answered YES to any of the questions above, please proceed to Section 2 below.

## 2 Information about the project

Title of Project: "How does an existing staff member becoming an apprentice impact on their social identity, behaviour, learning and professional influence within an organisation?"
Name of Principal Investigator (PI): Brendan Coulson
Names of co-investigators (CIs) (If any of the CIs are not employed at NTU, please give the name of their organisation): N/A
How many additional research staff will be employed on the project? Zero Please give their names (if known) and their organisational affiliation:
Project start date: 1 <sup>st</sup> May 2021
Estimated end date of the project: 1st October 2021
Who is funding the project? NTU Has funding been confirmed? Yes
(For PhD and Professional Doctorate students only) Have you applied for and received project approval? If so, please give date of approval: November 2020
(For PhD and Professional Doctorate students only) Please provide the name of your Director of Studies/Lead Supervisor and any other members of the supervisory team: Dr Rowena Hill (Director of Studies) Dr Ruth Richardson (Co-Supervisor)
Which learned society's code of ethical practice is most relevant to your project? (for example, the Social Research Association, the British Psychological Society, the Socio-legal Studies Association)? British Educational Research Association (BERA)

## 3 Does the project require Data and Barring Service (DBS) check (formerly CRB checks)

More information on DBS checks can be found by consulting document BLS Ethics 01 Guidance Staff and Students and/or from your Schools HR team (staff) or School Office (students):

	Yes	No
Does the project involve direct contact by any member of the research team with children, (under 18 years of age), vulnerable adults or adults in the custody of the criminal justice system?		X

If you have answered Yes to the above question, please explain the nature and frequency of the contact required by the project, and the circumstances in which it will be made. Please note that you may require DBS clearance and enquiries should be made of your Schools HR team to determine whether you do. This is not part of the BLSS REC process; it must be obtained through Schools HR (staff) or your School Office (students). See section 3 in the Guidance Notes BLSS/Ethics 01.

**4 Is this project liable to scrutiny by external ethical review arrangements?**

	Yes	No
Has a favourable ethical opinion been given for this project by an NHS or social care research ethics committee, or by any other external research ethics committee?		X
Will this project be submitted for ethical approval to an NHS or social care committee or any other external research ethics committee?		X

If you have answered YES to either of these questions, please sign the declaration at the end of the form and send a copy to Research Operations. Accompanying this should be a copy of the external body’s ethical approval.

**Ethical approval obtained at an institution with whom you are collaborating: please note that it is the responsibility of researchers to remain vigilant for unethical behaviour (defined as being in opposition to the NTU Research Ethics Policy and Code of Practice for Research) of any members of the project team, regardless of institutional affiliation and the location of the ethics committee that has approved the research. If such concerns arise, researchers should inform the Chair of the most appropriate NTU REC along with their School ADR and line manager.**

PhD/Professional Doctorate students must ask their Director of Studies/Lead Supervisor to countersign the form before submitting it.

Note - if you are applying to an NHS or Social Care REC, you are advised to consult Guidance Note BLSS/ Ethics 01

If you have answered NO to both these questions, please proceed to Section 5.

**5 About the project**

If the information required below is provided in a succinct form in a previous document, such as your application for external funding or for approval of a PhD/Professional Doctorate project you may submit this document (or preferably the relevant section from it) either in whole or partial answer to the questions below.

- (i) What are the aims and objectives of the project (**maximum 250 words**)?

**Aim**

*"How does an existing staff member becoming an apprentice impact on their social identity, behaviour, learning and professional influence within an organisation?"*

**Objectives**

1. Do employees’ preconceptions of an apprenticeship impact on their behaviour and social identity when they become an apprentice within their organisation?
2. Do employees’ perceptions of their social identity change during and after the apprenticeship?

- a. As a pre-existing employee, what is their opinion on how becoming an apprentice during their contract of employment impacts on their organisational standing?
  3. Does becoming an apprentice impact on pre-existing communities of practice or are new communities of practice formed?
  4. Do the apprentices believe that experiential learning is being used to support them to make progress?
  5. Does the apprentices' social identity, situated and experiential learning interlink, if so how?
- (ii). Briefly describe the principal methods, the sources of data or evidence to be used and the number and type of research participants who will be recruited to the project (**maximum 500 words**)

**Research Instrument Pilot study:**

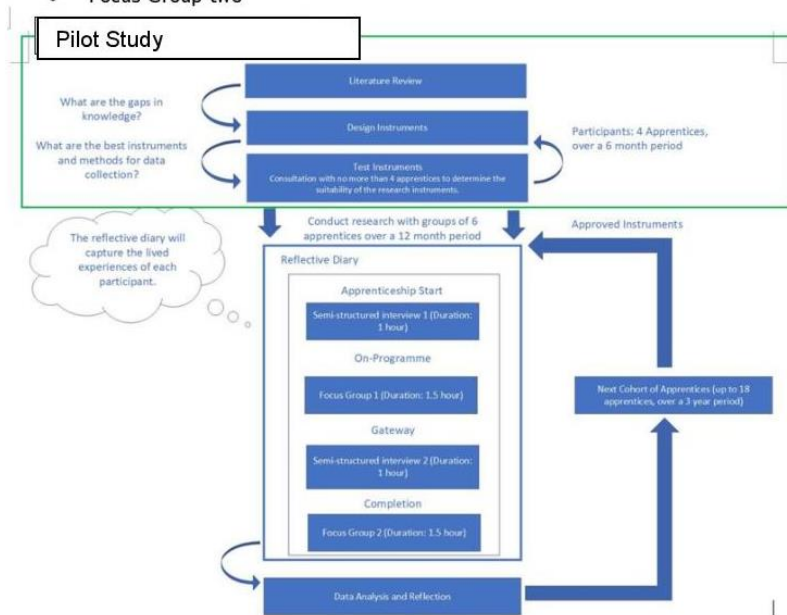
Prior the main study, over a six-month period, I intend to consult with no more than four participants that are either currently an apprentice or were an apprentice within the last 12 months. This is to determine the suitability of the research instruments that I am planning to use for the main project. Only the apprentices' opinions and recommendations regarding the research instruments will be sought after. This feedback will support improvements to the instruments before conducting the main project.

The opinions and recommendations of the participants will be stored in accordance to the project's approved Data Management Plan (see attached).

This ethical approval is just for the instrument pilot study phase (see figure one), ethical approval will be requested for each research work stream to allow for further ethical considerations to be considered at each stage of the project.

Research Work streams include:

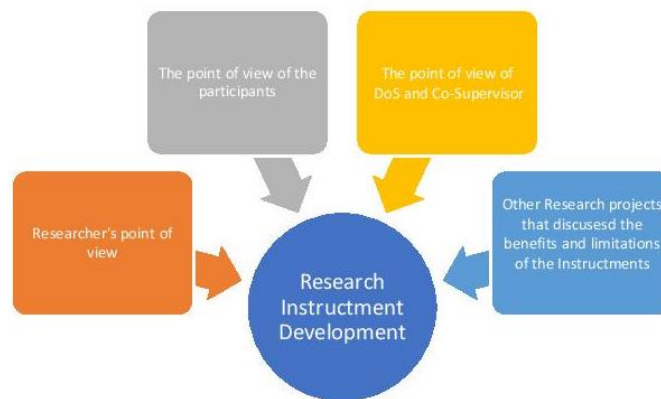
- Instrument Pilot study
- Reflective Diary
- Semi-structured Interviews one
- Focus Group one
- Semi-structured Interviews two
- Focus Group two



**Figure one – Research Approach**

To gather the views of the four participants, I propose to share the initial design of the instruments with the participants and conduct a semi-structured interview with each of them. This will enable me to consider their views on the quality of the proposed instruments. Each semi-structured interview will not exceed 1 hour. To increase rigour and consistency, the participants feedback will be analysed using thematical analysis.

In addition, I will work with my Director of Studies and Co-Supervisor to obtain their feedback regarding the instruments. Finally, I will continue to engage with a wide range of literature to determine how effective the instruments were used in other studies. I have adapted Brookfield's (1995) "Critical Lenses" model of reflection as shown in figure two; which I appreciate is a model of reflection within teaching practice. However, this provides me with a scaffold of reflection to consider all the stakeholders' views.



**Figure two – adapted version of Brookfield's (1999) Critical Lenses Model of Reflection**

Brookfield, S. 1995. *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*. San-Francisco: Jossey-Bass

*For information only: Main Study - Primary sources of data include:*

*My current thinking, before engaging in the instrument pilot study, is that the full project will be a longitudinal study. I will be using qualitative methods with cohorts of approximately 6 individual apprentices per year; totalling approximately 18 apprentices over a 2-3-year period.*

*The qualitative methods include two 1-hour semi-structure interviews, two 1.5-hour focus groups at key stages of their apprenticeship journey, and a reflective dairy that will be maintained by each apprentice throughout the duration of their apprenticeship. Once analysed, the data will inform the research findings.*

*The apprentices will be staff members of a School, College or University that become an apprentice during their contract of employment. For example, NTU lecturers that enrol on the Post Graduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PGCAP) apprenticeship and existing staff members either in a School or College that enrol to an apprenticeship during their employment.*

(iii). What research instrument(s) will be used to collect data?

For solely the purpose of the research pilot study, for which I am seeking ethical approval for, I will be using semi-structured interviews.

*For information only: It is anticipated that for the full study I will be using the following instruments:*

- *Semi-structured interviews*
- *Focus groups*
- *Online diary*



If you are using an externally validated scale, please specify:

If you are not using an externally validated scale, please attach a copy of the research instrument you will use to collect data (for example, a measurement scale, questionnaire, interview schedule, observation protocol for ethnographic work, or, in the case of unstructured data collection, a topic list).

**6 Confidentiality, anonymity, security and retention of research data**

	Yes	No
Are there any reasons why you cannot guarantee the full security and confidentiality of any personal or confidential data collected for the project?		X
Is there a significant possibility that any of your participants, or people associated with them, could be directly or indirectly identified in the outputs from this project?		X
Is there a significant possibility that confidential information could be traced back to a specific organisation or agency as a result of the way you write up the results of the project?		X
Will any members of the project team retain any personal or confidential data at the end of the project, other than in fully anonymised form?		X
<p>If you have answered NO to <u>any</u> of these questions, please explain briefly how you will ensure the confidentiality, anonymity and security of your research data, both during and after the project.</p> <p>I will strictly be working within the BERA guidelines to ensure that the confidentiality, anonymity and security of the research data, both during and after the project is maintained.</p> <p>I will anonymise organisations and participants involved within my study. This includes changing or omitting any identifying information in any write up of the research programme. All my research data will be stored centrally on NTU's secure systems and I will only use NTU systems to analyse the research findings.</p>		
<p>If the answer to <u>any</u> of these questions is YES, please explain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• why it is necessary for the research to be conducted in the way you propose, such that the usual standards of confidentiality and security cannot be respected;</li> <li>• what steps you will take to maximise confidentiality and security, within the constraints imposed by the research design;</li> <li>• what steps you will take to ensure that participants understand and consent to the implications of these constraints.</li> </ul>		

**7 Informed consent**

Please see Guidance Note BLSS/Ethics 02 for examples of model participant information sheets and participant consent forms, together with advice on how to use them

	Yes	No	N/A
Will all participants be fully informed before the project begins why the project is being conducted and what their participation will involve?	X		

Will every participant be required as a condition of their participation to give fully-informed consent to participating in the project, before it begins?	X		
Will all participants be fully informed about what data will be collected, and what will be done with this data during and after the project?	X		
If audio, video or photographic recording of participants are to be used, will fully-informed consent be secured as a condition of participation before recording begins? If yes, please provide further details below.	X		
Will every participant understand what rights they have to not take part, and/or to withdraw themselves and their data from the project if they do take part?	X		
Will they also understand that they do not need to give you reasons for exercising these rights and that there will be no repercussions as a result?	X		
Will the project involve deceiving or covert observation of participants?  If YES, please provide a justification and explain the debrief process in the box below.			X
<p>If you have answered YES to <u>any</u> of the above questions, please explain briefly how you will implement your answers.</p> <p>I will strictly be working within the BERA guidelines to ensure that the confidentiality, anonymity and security of the research data, both during and after the project is maintained.</p> <p>I will anonymise organisations and participants involved within my study. This includes changing or omitting any identifying information in any write up of the research programme. All my research data will be stored centrally on NTU's secure systems and I will only use NTU systems to analyse the research findings. The audio recording will be deleted within one month from the date the recording took place, this is to allow time for it to be transcribed. The anonymised transcripts will be kept for a period of 2 years and then deleted from storage.</p> <p>Every participant will be provided with an information sheet, so they understand what rights they have to not take part in this pilot study.</p> <p>Participants can request to withdraw themselves and their data from the project, participants are asked to email the researcher to inform him of their decision. The information sheet reassures the participants that they will not be asked to give any reason, and to inform them that their employment and apprenticeship will not be affected by their choice of participation within this study.</p> <p>You are required to attach copies of your participant information sheet and consent form as evidence of your plans.</p> <p>See attached</p>			
<p>If You have answered NO to <u>any</u> of questions 1-6 above, please explain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the reason for you proposing to conduct the project without ensuring that all of its participants give prior fully-informed consent; and</li> <li>• why you consider that reason to be sufficient justification to proceed on this basis.</li> </ul>			

**8 Risk of harm – to researchers, individual participants and participating organisations**

(If there is any possibility that the project involves significant risks to researchers, you are advised to consult section 8 of Guidance Note BLSS/Ethics 01 on the assessment and management of risk, and to submit a risk assessment form to the relevant authority).

	Yes	No
Could your research be classified as Special Risk research (see section 1 of this application form). If so, please consult Section 8 of Guidance Note BLSS/Ethics 01 for more information. If Yes, your application will be required to be endorsed by your School Associate Dean for Research (please see foot of this application document). This applies to both members of staff and Postgraduate Research Students.		X
Does your project involve collecting data on a face-to-face basis*		X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If you have answered yes to the above question* has your COVID-19 Face-to-Face Risk Assessment been inspected by Health and Safety?</li> </ul>		X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If you have answered yes to the above question* has your COVID-19 Face-to-Face Risk Assessment been signed by the Head of Department?</li> </ul>		X
Is there any foreseeable risk that your project may lead to:	Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physical harm to participants or researchers?</li> </ul>		X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Psychological or emotional distress to participants?</li> </ul>		X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Harm to the reputation of participants, or their employers, or of any other persons or organisations?</li> </ul>		X
<p>If you have answered YES to the question on Special Risk research, please explain/confirm:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explain why it is necessary to conduct the research in such a way as to qualify it as Special Risk research.</li> <li>If applicable, confirm that access to websites which may be proscribed by the UK Government or may be subject to surveillance by security services will be undertaken using the University network.</li> <li>Explain what, if any, steps will be taken, in addition to those listed in Section 6, to ensure that data obtained during the research project will be stored securely.</li> <li>If applicable, confirm that the transmission of data obtained during the research project to any co-investigators outside of the University network will be in encrypted format and using Zend, which encrypts files during transmission.</li> <li>If applicable, explain why the transportation of research data or materials is required and that an encrypted memory stick will be used where such transportation is necessary or unavoidable.</li> </ul> <p>If you have answered YES to this question* please complete the COVID-19 Face-to-Face Risk Assessment template</p> <p>If you have answered YES to <u>any</u> of the remaining questions, please explain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the nature of the risks involved, and why it is academically necessary for the project to incur them;</li> <li>how you propose to mitigate them;</li> <li>the arrangements by which you will ensure that participants understand and consent to these risks;</li> <li>any arrangements you will make to refer participants to sources of help, if they are seriously distressed or harmed as a result of taking part in the project;</li> <li>your arrangements for recording and reporting any adverse consequences of the research.</li> </ul>		

**9 Risk of disclosure of criminal offences, harm or potential harm**

If the project is likely to involve work with children, or the discovery of physical or mental abuse of children, you should consult section 9 of the Guidance Note: BLSS/Ethics 01 before completing this section of the form.

	Yes	No
Is there a significant risk that the project will lead participants to disclose evidence of previous criminal offences, or their intention to commit criminal offences?		X
Is there a significant risk that the project will lead participants to disclose evidence that children or vulnerable adults are being harmed, or are at risk of harm?		X
Is there a significant risk that the project will lead participants to disclose evidence of serious risk of other types of harm?		X
<p>If you have answered YES to <u>any</u> of these questions, please explain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• why it is academically necessary for these risks to be incurred;</li> <li>• what actions you would take, if such disclosures were to occur;</li> <li>• whether you will take advice before taking these actions, and from whom;</li> <li>• what information you will give participants about the possible consequences of disclosing information about criminal offences or risks of harm.</li> </ul>		

#### 10 Payment of participants

	Yes	No
Do you intend to offer participants cash payments or any other kind of inducements or compensation for taking part in your project?  If the answer is NO, please proceed to section 11.		X
Is there any significant possibility that such inducements will cause participants to consent to risks that they might not otherwise find acceptable?		X
Is there any significant possibility that the prospect of such inducements will systematically skew the data provided by participants in any way?		X
Will you inform participants that accepting inducements does not negate their right to withdraw from the project?		X
<p>If you have answered YES to <u>any</u> of these questions, please explain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the nature of the inducements or the amount of the payments that will be offered;</li> <li>• the reasons why it is necessary to offer them;</li> <li>• why you consider that they are ethically and methodologically acceptable.</li> </ul>		

#### 11 Capacity to give valid consent

Please note, from October 2007 research involving people who are mentally incapacitated and cannot give valid consent must be cleared through the NHS research ethics procedures, not through a university REC

Do you propose to recruit any participants from the following groups?	Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children under 18 years of age.</li> </ul>		X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>People with learning difficulties.</li> </ul>		X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>People with communication difficulties, including difficulties arising from limited facility with the English language.</li> </ul>		X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Very infirm people.</li> </ul>		X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To your knowledge, people with mental health problems or other medical problems that may impair their cognitive abilities.</li> </ul>		X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Any other people who may not be able fully to understand the nature of the research and the implications for them of participating in it.</li> </ul>		X
<p>If you have answered YES to <u>any</u> of these questions, please explain how you will ensure that the interests and wishes of participants (and in the case of children, the wishes of their parents or guardians) are understood and taken into account.</p>		

## 12 Is participation genuinely voluntary?

Do you propose to recruit participants from the following groups?	Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employees or students of NTU or of organisation(s) that are formal collaborators in the project.</li> </ul>	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can your research be considered to be pedagogic research, as defined as the use of student-related data for academic research purposes? See section 12 of BLSS Ethics 01 Guidance Document for further detail, particularly the distinction from learning analytics.</li> </ul>	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employees recruited through other business, voluntary or public sector organisations.</li> </ul>	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pupils or students recruited through educational institutions other than NTU.</li> </ul>	X	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clients recruited through voluntary or public services.</li> </ul>		X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>People who are resident in social care or medical establishments.</li> </ul>		X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>People recruited by virtue of their employment in the police or armed services.</li> </ul>		X

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People in the custody of the criminal justice system.</li> </ul>		X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other people who may not feel empowered to refuse to participate in the research.</li> </ul>		X
<p>If you have answered YES to question 2, please explain how you will ensure voluntary participation, informed consent and clarification of your role as researcher as distinct from teacher.</p> <p>See below</p> <p>If you have answered YES to <u>any</u> of these questions, please explain how your participants will be recruited, and what steps you will take to ensure that their participation in this project is genuinely voluntary.</p> <p>I have requested facilitated access to apprentices from the gate keepers of apprenticeship providers, pending ethical approval. The gate keepers have confirmed access pending successful ethical approval.</p> <p>I will provide the gate keepers with the details of the project by providing them with a copy of the information sheet and ask them to confirm whether they are willing to facilitate access to their apprentices. It is my intention to work with NTU's Apprenticeship team and my connections with other apprenticeship providers (e.g. North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire College, Nottingham College and West Nottinghamshire College) to discuss the opportunity with their apprentices. During this discussion, I will provide potential participants with the details of the project using the information sheet and through dialogue. I will then provide the apprentices with my NTU contact details. Once a participant contacts me, I will provide them with a one to one discussion regarding the project and answer any questions they have. After this discussion, I will provide the potential participants with the consent form. Once consent has been obtained, I will then conduct my research.</p> <p>The information sheet clearly states that their participation is entirely voluntary and informs them that their employment and apprenticeship will not be affected by their choice of participation in this study.</p>		

### 13 Online and Internet Research

If you intend to conduct any part of your project online, please consult Guidance Note BLSS/Ethics 03 before completing this section

	Yes	No
Will any part of your project involve collecting data by means of electronic media, such as the internet or email?	X	
Is there a significant possibility that the project will encourage children under 18 to access inappropriate websites, or correspond with people who pose risk of harm?		X
Is there a significant possibility that the project will cause participants to become distressed or harmed, in ways that may not be apparent to the researcher(s)?		X

Will the project incur any other risks that arise specifically from the use of electronic media?		X
<p>If you have answered YES to <u>any</u> of these questions, please explain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• why you propose to use electronic media;</li> <li>• how you propose to address the risks associated with online/internet research, especially those flagged above (if relevant).</li> </ul> <p>Due to Covid-19 and environmental factors, I intend to use an NTU platform such as Microsoft Teams to conduct the semi-structured interviews.</p> <p>Please ensure that your answers to other questions in this form address them in ways that are relevant to online research.</p>		

**14 Other ethical risks**

	Yes	No
Are there any other ethical issues or risks of harm raised by your project that have not been covered by previous questions?		X
<p>If you have answered YES, please explain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ the nature of these issues and risks;</li> <li>○ why you need to incur them;</li> <li>○ and how you propose to deal with them.</li> </ul> <p>Note that if your professional code of conduct requires you to report misconduct in other members of your profession, you should deal with any risks that your research might trigger this obligation in this section.</p>		

**15 Research with non-human vertebrates in their natural settings or behavioural work involving invertebrate species not covered by the Animals Scientific Procedures Act (1986).**

The Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 was amended in 1993. As a result, the common octopus (*octopus vulgaris*), as an invertebrate species, is now covered by the act.)

	Yes	No
Will any part of your project involve the study of animals in their natural habitat?		X
Will your project involve the recording of behaviour of animals in a non-natural setting that is outside of the control of the researcher?		X

Will your field work involve any direct intervention other than recording the behaviour of the animals available for observation?		<b>X</b>
Is the species you plan to research endangered, locally rare or part of a sensitive ecosystem protected by legislation?		<b>X</b>
Is there any significant possibility that the welfare of the target species or those sharing the local environment/habitat will be detrimentally affected?		<b>X</b>
Is there any significant possibility that the habitat of the animals will be damaged by the project, such that their health and survival will be endangered?		<b>X</b>
Will project work involve intervention work in a non-natural setting in relation to invertebrate species other than <i>octopus vulgaris</i> ?		<b>X</b>
<p>If you have answered YES to any of these questions, please explain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ the reasons for conducting the project in the way you propose, and the academic benefits that will flow from it;</li> <li>○ the nature of the risks to the animals and their habitat;</li> <li>○ how you propose to mitigate these risks.</li> </ul>		

**Principal Investigator's Declaration**

Please tick **all** the boxes relevant to your project and sign the form below.

**PhD/Professional Doctorate students must ask their Director of Studies/Lead Supervisor to countersign it before it is submitted.**

I request that this project is exempt from review by the BLSS Schools Research Ethics Committee, because it will be, or has been, reviewed by an external REC. I have completed Sections 1-4 and attach/will attach a copy of the favourable ethical review issued by the external REC	X
Please give the name of the external REC here:	
I request a statement of ethical approval from the BLSS Schools Research Ethics Committee and confirm that I have answered all relevant questions in this form honestly.	X
I confirm that I will carry out the project in the ways described above, and that I will request a fresh ethical approval if the project subsequently changes in ways that materially affect the information I have given in this form.	X



I confirm that I have read and agree to abide by the code of research ethics issued by the relevant national learned society, and that I have ensured that all members of my research team (if any) also do so.	X
I confirm that I have read and agree to abide by the University's <u>Research Data Management Policy</u> , and that I have ensured that those members of my research team (if any) who are employees of NTU also do so.	X
I confirm that I have read and agree to abide by the University's Research Integrity policies, and that I have ensured that those members of my research team (if any) who are employees of NTU also do so.	X
I confirm that I have read the appropriate guidance documents: BLSS Ethics 01 (Staff and Students General Guidelines) BLSS Ethics 02 (Informed Consent) BLSS Ethics 03 (Online Research)	X
I confirm that I have completed all sections of the application form as appropriate.	X
I confirm that I have attached a copy of the Participant Information Sheet, Consent Form, Questionnaire and any other relevant documentation as appropriate.	X
I confirm that I have signed and dated the application form.	X
PhD/Professional Doctorate students only: I confirm that I have ensured that my application form has been endorsed by my Director of Studies/Lead Supervisor.	X
PhD/Professional Doctorate students only: I confirm that I already have project approval.	X

Signed  (PI - Student)

Date 28/04/21

I have read this form and confirm that it covers all the ethical issues raised by this project fully and frankly. I also confirm that these issues have been discussed with the PGR and will continue to be reviewed in the course of supervision.

Countersigned R.Hill (Director of Studies)

Date 28/04/21

Note: If you are submitting this form by email, you should type your name in the signature space: an email attachment sent from your university inbox will be assumed to have been virtually signed by you.

If you are a student and are submitting this form by email, please attach an email from your Director of Studies/Lead Supervisor confirming that they are prepared to make the declaration above and to countersign this form: this email will be taken as a virtual countersignature.

**Communication to Potential Participants and Participants that have agreed to take part in this study.**

**I intend to email potential participants with the following:**

CC: Gatekeeper

Dear XXXX,

My name is Brendan Coulson, I am studying a PhD at Nottingham Trent University, I have been given permission to contact you to ask whether you would be interested to participate in a pilot study that will support the design and development of three research instruments, namely: Diary, Semi-Structured Interviews and Focus Groups.

**Why have I been chosen to take part?**

I am asking you to take part in this pilot study because you are either currently an apprentice (a person who is enrolled to an apprenticeship to achieve an occupational standard as regulated by [the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education](#)) or you have completed an apprenticeship within the last 12 months.

**What do you want me to do within the Pilot Study?**

Using the designs of the three instruments and your experience as an apprentice, review the effectiveness of each data collection method. You will be given a two-week period to consider the design, structure, the questions and so forth of the data collection methods. Your review of each instrument is likely to take you approximately 30 minutes per instrument.

**What is the purpose of the main study and what is my involvement?**

You will not be required to take part in the main study, you are only being asked to consider participation in the pilot study. The main study arises from the increase in existing staff members that enrol on apprenticeships as part of their employer's training and development programmes. For this purpose, I am studying the experiences of established staff members that become apprentices during their contract of employment, as opposed to those employees who are employed from the outset as an apprentice.

**Do I have to take part?**

Your participation is entirely voluntary, there is no pressure to take part in this study. Your employment and apprenticeship will not be affected by your choice of participation or withdrawal within this study.

**What do I need to do if I want to take part or would like more information?**

Please email [Brendan.coulson@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:Brendan.coulson@ntu.ac.uk) (Researcher), I will then arrange a 30 minute meeting with you over Microsoft Teams to discuss the project. You are not required to confirm your participation during the meeting. After the meeting, if you decide that you would like to participate then you will need to read the information sheet and sign the provided consent form, please then email these to [Brendan.coulson@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:Brendan.coulson@ntu.ac.uk). If you decide that you would rather not participate in this study, then no further action is required.

**I have already decided that I do not want to take part in this study**

No further action is required, please ignore this email.

Thank you for taking the time to consider your participation in this study, for further information, I have attached the pilot study's information sheet and consent form. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Kind Regards  
Brendan Coulson

I intend to email participants that have agreed to take part in the study with the following:

Dear XXXX

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this pilot, only your opinions regarding the instruments will be used in the main study, any responses you provide when piloting the research instruments will not be

used within the findings of this research project. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact [Brendan.coulson@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:Brendan.coulson@ntu.ac.uk) (Researcher). I will contact you within the next two weeks to arrange a one-hour semi-structured interview over Microsoft Teams.

Your participation is entirely voluntary, there is no pressure to take part in this study. You are still free to withdraw before XXXX. If you decide not to take part, or to withdraw at any stage, please do so by sending an email to the researcher, you will not be asked to give any reason. Please refer to the information sheet provided to you (see attached) for further information.

Your employment and apprenticeship will not be affected by your choice of participation or withdrawal within this study.

Please see attached the proposed research methods, please review the methods and prepare to feedback using the "Questions for you" section of each document.

Thank you again for your participation in this pilot study.

Kind Regards  
Brendan Coulson

**NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY**

**SCHOOLS OF BUSINESS, LAW AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**APPLICATION FORM FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL OF A RESEARCH PROJECT – 2020-21**

**For use by members of academic staff and postgraduate research students**

**PLEASE NOTE THAT IT NORMALLY TAKES BETWEEN 3-6 WEEKS TO PROCESS APPLICATIONS, DEPENDING ON WHETHER THE APPLICATION NEEDS TO GO TO A FULL MEETING OF BLSS REC (PLEASE SEE GUIDANCE NOTE: BLSS/Ethics 01 – PAGE 6). IF YOU ARE ASKED TO REVISE YOUR APPLICATION, IT MAY TAKE LONGER.**

**Who should use this form?**

This form is for use by academic staff and research degree students in the Schools of Business, Law and Social Sciences. If you are a student on a taught masters or undergraduate programme, you should follow the procedure laid down by your School REC.

If you are a PhD student, you should normally have received project approval before you apply for ethical approval. If there is a problem with this seek advice from your PhD supervisor.

Please note, that if following your application for project approval you find that you need to revise your research plans such that this ethics application no longer covers all aspects of your intended project, you will need to submit a revised application for ethical approval.

**Can I begin work before the project is ethically approved?**

If your project requires ethical approval (see overleaf and Section 1) you **must not** undertake primary data collection until a favourable ethical opinion is received from the BLSS Schools Research Ethics Committee or from an external REC. Collecting primary data in the absence of ethical approval, or in the face of an adverse ethical opinion, may constitute a disciplinary offence.

If, after receiving ethical approval, factors beyond your control change your project such that the information provided in this form no longer holds, the approval will automatically become void, and you should re-apply for ethical approval.

**Is there any help available to complete this form?**

Yes. Guidance on filling in this form can be found in Guidance Note BLSS/Ethics 01. If you are a member of staff you can find the guidance document on the research SharePoint site [here](#). If you are a PhD or Professional Doctorate student please click this [link](#) which will take you to NOW, and then follow this pathway to access the form: NOW Homepage > Student Communities > NTU Doctoral School > Content > Ethics Guidance. Professional doctorate students may also find guidance in their course learning rooms.

In this site, you will also find documents dealing with specific issues in research ethics, and some examples of participant information sheets and consent forms.

Further advice is available through Research Operations. Please email [annabel.cali@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:annabel.cali@ntu.ac.uk).

**Please note that any subsequent amendments to approved projects need to be re-submitted to BLSS REC for further consideration. Application forms and associated documentation, including issuance of approval, will be retained indefinitely. No research or personal data will be retained, with the exception of contact details of researchers.**

**Please make sure that you complete the Declaration at the end of the form.**

**Postgraduate research students must ask their Director of Studies/Lead Supervisor to countersign the form before it is submitted. Forms submitted without countersignatures will be returned.**

**Completing the Form**

**Which sections should I complete?**

Different sections of this form should be completed for different kinds of projects:

<b>If your project involves:</b>	
Desk-research only, using only secondary or published sources	See Section 1.
An application to an external research ethics committee (for example, those relating to research in the NHS)	Complete Sections 1-4.
Collection and/or analysis of primary, unpublished data from, or about, identifiable, living human beings (either in laboratory or in non-laboratory settings)	<p>Complete Sections 1-7.</p> <p>Please also complete the checklists in Sections 8-14 and provide information, as requested, if any of the checks are positive.</p>
Collection and/or analysis of data about the behaviour of human beings, in situations where they might reasonably expect their behaviour not to be observed or recorded	
Collection and/or analysis of primary, unpublished data from, or about people who have recently died	
Collection and/or analysis of primary, unpublished data from, or about, existing agencies or organisations	
Investigation of wildlife in its natural habitat	Complete Sections 1-5 and 15.
Research with human tissues or body fluids	Do not complete this form. Please contact your School Associate Dean for Research to discuss alternative arrangements for ethical review.
Research with animals, other than in their natural settings.	Do not complete this form. Please contact your School Associate Dean for Research to discuss alternative arrangements for ethical review.

Please type or write legibly in dark ink. You are asked to keep your answers as brief as possible, but you should provide sufficient detail for members of the Research Ethics Committee to form a view on the ethics of your proposed research. Where it is necessary, you may use up to one continuation sheet for each section of the form.

#### **Submitting the form**

Email your application to:

Annabel Cali

Research Operations

Arkwright Room B113

Email: [annabel.cali@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:annabel.cali@ntu.ac.uk)

**1 Does this project need ethical approval?**

	Yes	No
Does the project involve collecting and/or analysing primary or unpublished data from, or about, living human beings?	X	
Does it involve collecting and/or analysing primary or unpublished data about people who have recently died, other than data that is already in the public domain?		X
Does it involve collecting and/or analysing primary or unpublished data about or from organisations or agencies of any kind, other than data that is already in the public domain?		X
Does it involve research with non-human vertebrates in their natural settings or behavioural work involving invertebrate species not covered by the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986*?  *The Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 was amended in 1993. As a result, the common octopus ( <i>octopus vulgaris</i> ), as an invertebrate species, is now covered by the act.		X
Does the project involve any of the following activities:  5) Access to websites normally prohibited on university servers, for example pornography or sites of organisations proscribed by the UK Government. 6) Investigation into extremism or radicalisation. 7) Accessing and using data of a potentially damaging nature which has been obtained from a source which may not have the requisite authority to provide it. Here, potentially damaging can mean anything from information on cases of domestic abuse to data on international spy networks. In case of uncertainty, please consult Research Operations or your School Associate Dean for Research. 8) The acquisition of security clearances, including the Official Secrets Act.  Hereinafter referred to as ' <b>Special Risk Research</b> '.		X

**FOR STAFF ONLY:** If you have answered NO to all the questions above, you do not need to submit your project for ethical approval.

**FOR PhD/PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE STUDENTS ONLY:** If you have answered NO to all the questions above, please complete the section below.

Name:
School:
Name of Director of Studies:

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ (Student)

Date\_

I have read this form, and confirm that, due to the nature of the research this project does not require the approval of a research ethics committee.

Countersigned \_\_\_\_\_ (Director of Studies)

Date \_\_\_\_\_

If the answer to any of the above questions is Yes, please proceed to Section 2 below

If you have answered YES to any of the questions above, please proceed to Section 2 below.

## 2 Information about the project

Title of Project: <i>"How does an existing staff member becoming an apprentice impact on their social identity, behaviour, learning and professional influence within an organisation?"</i>
Name of Principal Investigator (PI): Brendan Coulson
Names of co-investigators (CIs) (If any of the CIs are not employed at NTU, please give the name of their organisation) N/A
How many additional research staff will be employed on the project?  Zero  Please give their names (if known) and their organisational affiliation:
Project start date: 6 <sup>th</sup> September 2021
Estimated end date of the project: 6 <sup>th</sup> March 2023
Who is funding the project? NTU Has funding been confirmed? Yes
(For PhD and Professional Doctorate students only) Have you applied for and received project approval?  If so, please give date of approval: November 2020
(For PhD and Professional Doctorate students only) Please provide the name of your Director of Studies/Lead Supervisor and any other members of the supervisory team:  Dr Rowena Hill (Director of Studies) Dr Ruth Richards (Co-Supervisor)

Which learned society's code of ethical practice is most relevant to your project? (for example, the Social Research Association, the British Psychological Society, the Socio-legal Studies Association)?

British Educational Research Association (BERA)

**3 Does the project require Data and Barring Service (DBS) check (formerly CRB checks)**

More information on DBS checks can be found by consulting document BLS Ethics 01 Guidance Staff and Students and/or from your Schools HR team (staff) or School Office (students):

	Yes	No
Does the project involve direct contact by any member of the research team with children, (under 18 years of age), vulnerable adults or adults in the custody of the criminal justice system?		X
<p>If you have answered Yes to the above question, please explain the nature and frequency of the contact required by the project, and the circumstances in which it will be made. Please note that you may require DBS clearance and enquiries should be made of your Schools HR team to determine whether you do. This is not part of the BLSS REC process; it must be obtained through Schools HR (staff) or your School Office (students). See section 3 in the Guidance Notes BLSS/Ethics 01.</p> <p>The study will focus on adults (18+) to enable the participants to make comparisons to their experiential learning before becoming an apprentice within their current contract of employment.</p>		

**4 Is this project liable to scrutiny by external ethical review arrangements?**

	Yes	No
Has a favourable ethical opinion been given for this project by an NHS or social care research ethics committee, or by any other external research ethics committee?		X
Will this project be submitted for ethical approval to an NHS or social care committee or any other external research ethics committee?		X

If you have answered YES to either of these questions, please sign the declaration at the end of the form and send a copy to Research Operations. Accompanying this should be a copy of the external body's ethical approval.

**Ethical approval obtained at an institution with whom you are collaborating: please note that it is the responsibility of researchers to remain vigilant for unethical behaviour (defined as being in opposition to the NTU Research Ethics Policy and Code of Practice for Research) of any members of the project team, regardless of institutional affiliation and the location of the ethics committee that has approved the research. If such concerns arise, researchers should inform the Chair of the most appropriate NTU REC along with their School ADR and line manager.**

PhD/Professional Doctorate students must ask their Director of Studies/Lead Supervisor to countersign the form before submitting it.

Note - if you are applying to an NHS or Social Care REC, you are advised to consult Guidance Note BLSS/ Ethics 01



If you have answered NO to both these questions, please proceed to Section 5.

## 5 About the project

If the information required below is provided in a succinct form in a previous document, such as your application for external funding or for approval of a PhD/Professional Doctorate project you may submit this document (or preferably the relevant section from it) either in whole or partial answer to the questions below.

- (ii) What are the aims and objectives of the project (**maximum 250 words**)?

### Aim

*"How does an existing staff member becoming an apprentice impact on their social identity, behaviour, learning and professional influence within an organisation?"*

### Objectives

6. How do employees' preconceptions of an apprenticeship impact on their behaviour and social identity when they become an apprentice within their organisation?
7. How do employees' perceptions of their social identity change during and after the apprenticeship?
  - a. As a pre-existing employee, what is their opinion on how becoming an apprentice during their contract of employment impacts on their organisational standing?
8. How does becoming an apprentice impact on pre-existing communities of practice or are new communities of practice formed?
9. Do the apprentices believe that experiential learning is being used to support them to make progress, if so how?
10. Does the apprentices' social identity, situated and experiential learning interlink, if so how?

- (ii). Briefly describe the principal methods, the sources of data or evidence to be used and the number and type of research participants who will be recruited to the project (**maximum 500 words**)

I have already received a favourable ethics opinion to conduct a study with several participants, over 12 months to gather qualitative data to establish what their lived experiences are in the context of the aim and objectives.

The researcher will be using qualitative methods with at least 6 individual apprentices, and perhaps more if saturation is not achieved, Robson (2002). However, this should not exceed more than 12 apprentices.

The participants will be studying their apprenticeship at level 2 or at any level through to level 7, either at a private training provider, College or University. The participants will be aged 18 and over, and could be employed within any sector, the common factor is that all apprentices should be already employed before starting an apprenticeship.

The qualitative methods include 3 x qualitative questionnaires, 2 x 1-hour semi-structured interviews, and 2 x 1.5-hour focus groups at key stages of their apprenticeship journey; once analysed, the data will inform the research findings.

Robson, C., 2002. Real world research: A resource for social scientists and practitioner-researchers. John Wiley and Sons Ltd

(iii). What research instrument(s) will be used to collect data?

- *Semi-structured interviews x 2*
- *Focus groups x 2*
- *Qualitative Questionnaire x 3*
- *One additional Semi-Structured Interview on request of a participant*

If you are using an externally validated scale, please specify:

If you are not using an externally validated scale, please attach a copy of the research instrument you will use to collect data (for example, a measurement scale, questionnaire, interview schedule, observation protocol for ethnographic work, or, in the case of unstructured data collection, a topic list).

**6 Confidentiality, anonymity, security, and retention of research data**

	Yes	No
Are there any reasons why you cannot guarantee the full security and confidentiality of any personal or confidential data collected for the project?	X	
Is there a significant possibility that any of your participants, or people associated with them, could be directly or indirectly identified in the outputs from this project?	X	
Is there a significant possibility that confidential information could be traced back to a specific organisation or agency as a result of the way you write up the results of the project?		X
Will any members of the project team retain any personal or confidential data at the end of the project, other than in fully anonymised form?		X
<p>If you have answered NO to <u>any</u> of these questions, please explain briefly how you will ensure the confidentiality, anonymity, and security of your research data, both during and after the project.</p> <p>I will strictly be working within the BERA guidelines to ensure that the confidentiality, anonymity, and security of the research data, both during and after the project is maintained.</p> <p>I will anonymise organisations and participants involved within my study. This includes changing or omitting any identifying information in any write up of the research programme. All my research data will be stored centrally on NTU's secure systems and I will only use NTU systems to analyse the research findings.</p>		
<p>If the answer to <u>any</u> of these questions is YES, please explain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• why it is necessary for the research to be conducted in the way you propose, such that the usual standards of confidentiality and security cannot be respected;</li> <li>• what steps you will take to maximise confidentiality and security, within the constraints imposed by the research design;</li> <li>• what steps you will take to ensure that participants understand and consent to the implications of these constraints.</li> </ul> <p>I cannot guarantee confidentiality in the data collection, or within the outputs, due to group participation within focus group discussions where other participants might know the identity of the</p>		

other participants, however I have tried to minimise this risk by allowing the participants to switch their cameras off, and by including the following statement in the consent form that all participants must agree with before participating within this study, in addition to the above measures.

*"I will keep the identity of any of the other participants confidential" (see consent form)*

## 7 Informed consent

Please see Guidance Note BLSS/Ethics 02 for examples of model participant information sheets and participant consent forms, together with advice on how to use them

	Yes	No	N / A
Will all participants be fully informed before the project begins why the project is being conducted and what their participation will involve?	X		
Will every participant be required as a condition of their participation to give fully-informed consent to participating in the project, before it begins?	X		
Will all participants be fully informed about what data will be collected, and what will be done with this data during and after the project?	X		
If audio, video or photographic recording of participants are to be used, will fully-informed consent be secured as a condition of participation before recording begins? If yes, please provide further details below.	X		
Will every participant understand what rights they have to not take part, and/or to withdraw themselves and their data from the project if they do take part?	X		
Will they also understand that they do not need to give you reasons for exercising these rights and that there will be no repercussions as a result?	X		
Will the project involve deceiving or covert observation of participants?			X
If YES, please provide a justification and explain the debrief process in the box below.			

If you have answered YES to any of the above questions, please explain briefly how you will implement your answers.

The participant has already received a copy of a detailed information sheet and has signed the consent form, so all is aware of their rights, the project's aim and objectives, data collections processes, how the data will be used, and details regarding how I intend to ensure anonymity and security of the research data.

I will strictly be working within the BERA guidelines to ensure that the confidentiality, anonymity, and security of the research data, both during and after the project is maintained.

I will anonymise organisations and participants involved within my study. This includes changing or omitting any identifying information in any write up of the research programme. All my research data will be stored centrally on NTU's secure systems and I will only use NTU systems to analyse

the research findings. The audio recording will be deleted within one month from the date the recording took place, this is to allow time for it to be transcribed. The anonymised transcripts will be archived for 10 years following publication of the thesis according to the NTU Records Retention Schedule ([NTU Records Retention Schedule](#)) and then deleted from storage.

A data management plan has also been developed and approved to support with the management of the data in line with NTU's Records Retention Schedule. As a result, file and naming conventions have been agreed when storing the data, and a secure location has been made available that is only accessible via a secure link. - See NEW\_NTU PGR Data Management Plan and NEW\_Service Manager Re Active Research Data Storage ExistingStaffApprenticeships.

Every participant will be provided with an information sheet, so they understand what rights they have to not take part in this study.

Participants can request to withdraw themselves and their data from the project before 7<sup>th</sup> April 2023. Participants are asked to email the researcher to inform him of their decision. The information sheet reassures the participants that they will not be asked to give any reason, and to inform them that their employment and apprenticeship will not be affected by their choice of participation within this study.

You are required to attach copies of your participant information sheet and consent form as evidence of your plans.

See attached

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If You have answered NO to any of questions 1-6 above, please explain:

- the reason for you proposing to conduct the project without ensuring that all of its participants give prior fully-informed consent; and
- why you consider that reason to be sufficient justification to proceed on this basis.

**8 Risk of harm – to researchers, individual participants, and participating organisations**

(If there is any possibility that the project involves significant risks to researchers, you are advised to consult section 8 of Guidance Note BLSS/Ethics 01 on the assessment and management of risk, and to submit a risk assessment form to the relevant authority).

	Yes	No
Could your research be classified as Special Risk research (see section 1 of this application form). If so, please consult Section 8 of Guidance Note BLSS/Ethics 01 for more information. If Yes, your application will be required to be endorsed by your School Associate Dean for Research (please see foot of this application document). This applies to both members of staff and Postgraduate Research Students.		<b>X</b>
Does your project involve collecting data on a face-to-face basis*		<b>X</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If you have answered yes to the above question* has your COVID-19 Face-to-Face Risk Assessment been inspected by Health and Safety?</li> </ul>		<b>X</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If you have answered yes to the above question* has your COVID-19 Face-to-Face Risk Assessment been signed by the Head of Department?</li> </ul>		<b>X</b>
Is there any foreseeable risk that your project may lead to:	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physical harm to participants or researchers?</li> </ul>		X
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Psychological or emotional distress to participants?</li> </ul>		X

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Harm to the reputation of participants, or their employers, or of any other persons or organisations?</li> </ul>		X
<p>If you have answered YES to the question on Special Risk research, please explain/confirm :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explain why it is necessary to conduct the research in such a way as to qualify it as Special Risk research.</li> <li>If applicable, confirm that access to websites which may be proscribed by the UK Government or may be subject to surveillance by security services will be undertaken using the University network.</li> <li>Explain what, if any, steps will be taken, in addition to those listed in Section 6, to ensure that data obtained during the research project will be stored securely.</li> <li>If applicable, confirm that the transmission of data obtained during the research project to any co-investigators outside of the University network will be in encrypted format and using Zend, which encrypts files during transmission.</li> <li>If applicable, explain why the transportation of research data or materials is required and that an encrypted memory stick will be used where such transportation is necessary or unavoidable.</li> </ul> <p>If you have answered YES to this question* please complete the COVID-19 Face-to-Face Risk Assessment template</p> <p>If you have answered YES to <u>any</u> of the remaining questions, please explain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the nature of the risks involved, and why it is academically necessary for the project to incur them;</li> <li>how you propose to mitigate them;</li> <li>the arrangements by which you will ensure that participants understand and consent to these risks;</li> <li>any arrangements you will make to refer participants to sources of help, if they are seriously distressed or harmed as a result of taking part in the project;</li> <li>your arrangements for recording and reporting any adverse consequences of the research.</li> </ul>		

## 9 Risk of disclosure of criminal offences, harm or potential harm

If the project is likely to involve work with children, or the discovery of physical or mental abuse of children, you should consult section 9 of the Guidance Note: BLSS/Ethics 01 before completing this section of the form.

	Yes	No
Is there a significant risk that the project will lead participants to disclose evidence of previous criminal offences, or their intention to commit criminal offences?		X
Is there a significant risk that the project will lead participants to disclose evidence that children or vulnerable adults are being harmed, or are at risk of harm?		X
Is there a significant risk that the project will lead participants to disclose evidence of serious risk of other types of harm?		X

If you have answered YES to any of these questions, please explain:

- why it is academically necessary for these risks to be incurred;
- what actions you would take, if such disclosures were to occur;
- whether you will take advice before taking these actions, and from whom;
- what information you will give participants about the possible consequences of disclosing information about criminal offences or risks of harm.

**10 Payment of participants**

	Yes	No
Do you intend to offer participants cash payments or any other kind of inducements or compensation for taking part in your project?  If the answer is NO, please proceed to section 11.		X
Is there any significant possibility that such inducements will cause participants to consent to risks that they might not otherwise find acceptable?		X
Is there any significant possibility that the prospect of such inducements will systematically skew the data provided by participants in any way?		X
Will you inform participants that accepting inducements does not negate their right to withdraw from the project?		X
<p>If you have answered YES to <u>any</u> of these questions, please explain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the nature of the inducements or the amount of the payments that will be offered;</li> <li>• the reasons why it is necessary to offer them;</li> <li>• why you consider that they are ethically and methodologically acceptable.</li> </ul>		

**11 Capacity to give valid consent**

Please note, from October 2007 research involving people who are mentally incapacitated and cannot give valid consent must be cleared through the NHS research ethics procedures, not through a university REC

Do you propose to recruit any participants from the following groups?	Yes	No
• Children under 18 years of age.		X
• People with learning difficulties.		X
• People with communication difficulties, including difficulties arising from limited facility with the English language.		X

• Very infirm people.		X
• To your knowledge, people with mental health problems or other medical problems that may impair their cognitive abilities.		X
• Any other people who may not be able fully to understand the nature of the research and the implications for them of participating in it.		X
<p>If you have answered YES to <u>any</u> of these questions, please explain how you will ensure that the interests and wishes of participants (and in the case of children, the wishes of their parents or guardians) are understood and taken into account.</p> <p>Note from researcher: The study will focus on adults (18+) to enable the participants to make comparisons to their experiential learning before becoming an apprentice within their current contract of employment.</p>		

**12 Is participation genuinely voluntary?**

Do you propose to recruit participants from the following groups?	Yes	No
• Employees or students of NTU or of organisation(s) that are formal collaborators in the project.	X	
• Can your research be considered to be pedagogic research, as defined as the use of student-related data for academic research purposes? See section 12 of BLSS Ethics 01 Guidance Document for further detail, particularly the distinction from learning analytics.	X	
• Employees recruited through other business, voluntary or public sector organisations.	X	
• Pupils or students recruited through educational institutions other than NTU.	X	
• Clients recruited through voluntary or public services.		X
• People who are resident in social care or medical establishments.		X
• People recruited by virtue of their employment in the police or armed services.		X
• People in the custody of the criminal justice system.		X
• Other people who may not feel empowered to refuse to participate in the research.		X

If you have answered YES to question 2, please explain how you will ensure voluntary participation, informed consent and clarification of your role as researcher as distinct from teacher.

See below

If you have answered YES to any of these questions, please explain how your participants will be recruited, and what steps you will take to ensure that their participation in this project is genuinely voluntary.

Note from researcher: The study will focus on adults (18+) to enable the participants to make comparisons to their experiential learning before becoming an apprentice within their current contract of employment.

I have requested facilitated access to apprentices from the gate keepers of apprenticeship providers, pending ethical approval. The gate keepers have confirmed access pending successful ethical approval.

I will provide the gate keepers with the details of the project by providing them with a copy of the information sheet and ask them to confirm whether they are willing to facilitate access to their apprentices. It is my intention to work with NTU's Apprenticeship team and my connections with other apprenticeship providers (e.g., North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire College, Nottingham College, Chesterfield College, Remit Training and Vision West Nottinghamshire College) to discuss the opportunity with their apprentices. During this discussion, I will provide potential participants with the details of the project using the information sheet and through dialogue. I will then provide the apprentices with my NTU contact details. If the participant uptake in less than 6, I will also use LinkedIn to promote the opportunity to participate in this study. Once a participant contacts me through any of my previous communications, I will provide them with a one-to-one discussion regarding the project and answer any questions they have. After this discussion, I will provide the potential participants with the consent form. Once consent has been obtained, I will then conduct my research.

The information sheet clearly states that their participation is entirely voluntary and informs them that their employment and apprenticeship will not be affected by their choice of participation in this study.

### 13 Online and Internet Research

If you intend to conduct any part of your project online, please consult Guidance Note BLSS/Ethics 03 before completing this section

	Yes	No
Will any part of your project involve collecting data by means of electronic media, such as the internet or email?	X	
Is there a significant possibility that the project will encourage children under 18 to access inappropriate websites, or correspond with people who pose risk of harm?		X



Is there a significant possibility that the project will cause participants to become distressed or harmed, in ways that may not be apparent to the researcher(s)?		X
Will the project incur any other risks that arise specifically from the use of electronic media?		X
<p>If you have answered YES to <u>any</u> of these questions, please explain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• why you propose to use electronic media;</li> <li>• how you propose to address the risks associated with online/internet research, especially those flagged above (if relevant).</li> </ul> <p>I intend to use an NTU platform such as Microsoft Teams to conduct the semi-structured interviews and focus groups.</p> <p>I also intend to communicate and send out the questionnaires using email communication.</p> <p>All necessary precautions as previously discussed will be taken to ensure anonymity and upheld confidentiality, including marking the email as confidential. There will be no group emails sent out, only individual emails sent directly to each participant.</p> <p>Please ensure that your answers to other questions in this form address them in ways that are relevant to online research.</p>		

**14 Other ethical risks**

	Yes	No
Are there any other ethical issues or risks of harm raised by your project that have not been covered by previous questions?		X
<p>If you have answered YES, please explain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ the nature of these issues and risks;</li> <li>○ why you need to incur them;</li> <li>○ and how you propose to deal with them.</li> </ul> <p>Note that if your professional code of conduct requires you to report misconduct in other members of your profession, you should deal with any risks that your research might trigger this obligation in this section.</p>		

**15 Research with non-human vertebrates in their natural settings or behavioural work involving invertebrate species not covered by the Animals Scientific Procedures Act (1986).**

The Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 was amended in 1993. As a result, the common octopus (*octopus vulgaris*), as an invertebrate species, is now covered by the act.)

	Yes	No
Will any part of your project involve the study of animals in their natural habitat?		X
Will your project involve the recording of behaviour of animals in a non-natural setting that is outside of the control of the researcher?		X
Will your field work involve any direct intervention other than recording the behaviour of the animals available for observation?		X
Is the species you plan to research endangered, locally rare or part of a sensitive ecosystem protected by legislation?		X
Is there any significant possibility that the welfare of the target species or those sharing the local environment/habitat will be detrimentally affected?		X
Is there any significant possibility that the habitat of the animals will be damaged by the project, such that their health and survival will be endangered?		X
Will project work involve intervention work in a non-natural setting in relation to invertebrate species other than <i>octopus vulgaris</i> ?		X
<p>If you have answered YES to any of these questions, please explain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o the reasons for conducting the project in the way you propose, and the academic benefits that will flow from it;</li> <li>o the nature of the risks to the animals and their habitat;</li> <li>o how you propose to mitigate these risks.</li> </ul>		

**Principal Investigator's Declaration**

Please tick **all** the boxes relevant to your project and sign the form below.

**PhD/Professional Doctorate students must ask their Director of Studies/Lead Supervisor to countersign it before it is submitted.**

I request that this project is exempt from review by the BLSS Schools Research Ethics Committee, because it will be, or has been, reviewed by an external REC. I have completed Sections 1-4 and attach/will attach a copy of the favourable ethical review issued by the external REC  Please give the name of the external REC here:	X
I request a statement of ethical approval from the BLSS Schools Research Ethics Committee and confirm that I have answered all relevant questions in this form honestly.	X
I confirm that I will carry out the project in the ways described above, and that I will request a fresh ethical approval if the project subsequently changes in ways that materially affect the information I have given in this form.	X
I confirm that I have read and agree to abide by the code of research ethics issued by the relevant national learned society, and that I have ensured that all members of my research team (if any) also do so.	X
I confirm that I have read and agree to abide by the University's <a href="#">Research Data Management Policy</a> , and that I have ensured that those members of my research team (if any) who are employees of NTU also do so.	X
I confirm that I have read and agree to abide by the University's Research Integrity policies, and that I have ensured that those members of my research team (if any) who are employees of NTU also do so.	X
I confirm that I have read the appropriate guidance documents:  BLSS Ethics 01 (Staff and Students General Guidelines)  BLSS Ethics 02 (Informed Consent)  BLSS Ethics 03 (Online Research)	X
I confirm that I have completed all sections of the application form as appropriate.	X
I confirm that I have attached a copy of the Participant Information Sheet, Consent Form, Questionnaire and any other relevant documentation as appropriate.	X
I confirm that I have signed and dated the application form.	X
PhD/Professional Doctorate students only: I confirm that I have ensured that my application form has been endorsed by my Director of Studies/Lead Supervisor.	X
PhD/Professional Doctorate students only: I confirm that I already have project approval.	X

Signed  (PI - Student)

Date\_ 24/10/22

I have read this form and confirm that it covers all the ethical issues raised by this project fully and frankly. I also confirm that these issues have been discussed with the PGR and will continue to be reviewed in the course of supervision.

Countersigned R.Hill (Director of Studies)

Date 24/10/22

Note: If you are submitting this form by email, you should type your name in the signature space: an email attachment sent from your university inbox will be assumed to have been virtually signed by you.

If you are a student and are submitting this form by email, please attach an email from your Director of Studies/Lead Supervisor confirming that they are prepared to make the declaration above and to countersign this form: this email will be taken as a virtual countersignature.

### **Research Information**

**Study Title:** *"How does an existing staff member becoming an apprentice impact on their social identity, behaviour, learning and professional influence within an organisation?"*

**Date:**

**Researcher:** Brendan Coulson, Education Start-up Lead, Nottingham Trent University.

### **Introduction**

Thank you for considering participating in this study. Before you decide whether you would like to participate, it is important that you understand the reason why this study is being carried out, and what your participation will involve. I would be grateful if you would take time to read the following information carefully. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions you may have.

### **What is the purpose of this study?**

This study arises from the increase in existing staff members that enrol on apprenticeships as part of their employer's training and development programmes. For this purpose, I am studying the experiences of established staff members that become apprentices during their contract of employment, as opposed to those employees who are employed from the outset as an apprentice. I am interested to explore this type of employee to determine how becoming an apprentice impacts on their social identity (e.g., the apprentice's understanding of who they are within their organisation), behaviour, learning and professional influence within the organisation that they are employed.

### **Why have I been chosen to take part?**

I am asking you to take part in this study because you were already employed before starting an apprenticeship and are over the age of 18. You therefore fulfil the criteria required to participate within this study, i.e., you are an existing employee that becomes an apprentice (a person who is enrolled to an apprenticeship to achieve an occupational standard as regulated by [the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education](#)).

### **Who is funding this study?**

The study is funded by Nottingham Trent University (NTU). This funding allows the study to be undertaken as a piece of independent, academic research which will form the main part of my research towards completion of my PhD thesis. I hope that the results will be useful to policymakers in government, apprenticeship providers and individuals.

### **Do I have to take part?**

Your participation is entirely voluntary, there is no pressure to take part in this study. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep, and you will also be asked to sign a

consent form. You will still be free to withdraw before 7<sup>th</sup> April 2023 without giving any reason and without recourse. If you decide not to take part, or to withdraw, please do so by sending an email to the researcher.

Your employment and apprenticeship will not be affected by your choice of participation or withdrawal within this study.

Please note failure to withdraw before 7<sup>th</sup> April 2023 may result in your anonymised opinions/recommendations being used within this study

### **What do you want me to do?**

I would like you to take part in 3 x qualitative questionnaires, 2 x 1-hour semi-structured interviews, and 2 x 1.5-hour focus groups at key stages of your apprenticeship journey; once analysed, the data will inform the research findings.

The semi-structured interviews and focus groups will take place online using Microsoft Teams and will be arranged at a time that is mutually convenient. You are free to keep your camera off during the interviews, there will be no other participants present during the interviews. In the focus groups, your identity will be visible to the researcher and the other participants. All participants are required to consent to keeping the identity of other participants confidential, therefore the risk of exposure is minimised, but not guaranteed. In addition, participants are welcome to keep their cameras off during these group discussions. I will ask for your written permission to confirm your participation in this study, and to confirm that the information you give me is accurately recorded.

### **What will happen to the information I give in the study?**

Your responses will be used to inform the findings of this study, for the semi-structured interviews and focus groups, these will be transcribed and then analysed. The main study will include this analysis and may include quotes directly from any transcripts. An analysis of all the questionnaires will also be used within the main study, and this may include some direct quotes. The transcripts and subsequent analysis will be fully anonymised by me, any information that identifies you, your organisation and apprenticeship provider, or that gives any clues to your identity, will be removed. I am confident that these precautions will ensure that no-one will be able to trace your transcript back to you, your organisation and apprenticeship provider. To increase rigour and consistency, the transcripts will be analysed by me, using thematic analysis. The audio recordings will be deleted within one month from the date the recording took place, this is to allow time for them to be transcribed. The anonymised transcripts will be archived for 10 years following publication of the thesis according to the NTU Records Retention Schedule ([NTU Records Retention Schedule](#)) and then deleted from storage. All data is managed through an approved data management plan, and data will be stored on a secured file location that is only accessible via a secured network.

### **How will you protect my confidentiality and anonymity?**

The transcripts and any of the responses within the questionnaires will be handled only by myself, in line with data protection principles and NTU's approved research protocol. Any hard copies of research notes are kept in locked filing cabinets at NTU, and all electronic files are kept on password protected computers which are not accessible to anyone other than me. You will not be named or otherwise identified in any publication arising from this study or from any unpublished opinions or information, either by name or position.

Any email communication sent to you will be marked as confidential, you will only be sent a direct email from the researcher and not as part of a group email.

There is a risk that your identity might be exposed to the other participants during the focus group discussions, and therefore these participants might also be able to identify which participant provided a certain response within the outputs of the research project. The following measures have been taken to minimise this risk: all participants must consent to keeping the identity of all other participants confidential within the consent form, otherwise they cannot participate within the study. In addition, participants are welcome to keep their cameras off during these group discussions.

I will exercise all possible care to ensure that you, your organisation, and apprenticeship provider cannot be identified by the way I write up the findings.

**What are the possible disadvantages and risks in taking part?**

The main cost to you will be the time needed to participate in the study. I am confident that the arrangements described in this document will prevent any of your information being lost or shared. For this reason, I believe that the risk of detriment is very low. I will not seek information about you, your organisation and apprenticeship provider; outside of the parameters discussed within the purpose of this study.

**What are the possible benefits?**

I hope that you will find the study interesting and will take satisfaction from helping to develop knowledge that could be used to inform future apprenticeship policy at local and national institutions. Participants will be provided with a summary of the findings/briefing paper once the thesis is published.

**Has anyone reviewed the study?**

As well as being reviewed by my Director of studies, Dr Rowena Hill and Co-supervisor Dr Ruth Richards, the study was reviewed by an Independent Assessor, Dr Sue Dymoke (NTU). This study has received a favourable ethics opinion from NTU's Schools of Business, Law and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

**Who is responsible if anything goes wrong?**

This study is being administered by Nottingham Trent University (NTU). NTU is therefore responsible for the conduct of the study.

**What do I need to do if I want to participate?**

Please complete the attached consent form and email it to [Brendan.coulson@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:Brendan.coulson@ntu.ac.uk) by [Date]. Alternatively, if you decide that you would rather not participate then you do not need to do anything.

**Support**

If the detail in this information sheet has caused you distress, then please access support from your organisation's Occupational Health team or through your Employee Assistance Programme (EAP).

**Further information**

Please feel welcome to contact me for further information or if you have any additional questions, at the following address:

**Researcher Contact Details:**

**Brendan Coulson**

**NTU Education Project Start-Up Lead**

Nottingham Trent University, Clifton Lane, Nottingham, NG11 8NS

**Email:** [brendan.coulson@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:brendan.coulson@ntu.ac.uk), **Telephone:** 0115 84 83116

**Director of Studies Contact Details:**

**Dr. Rowena Hill C Psychol, AFBPsS, FHEA**

**Associate Professor of Disasters and Emergencies**

Nottingham Trent University, Clifton Lane, Nottingham, NG11 8NS

**Email:** [rowena.hill@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:rowena.hill@ntu.ac.uk), **Telephone:** 07584336023

**CONSENT FORM**

**Project Title:** "How does an existing staff member becoming an apprentice impact on their social identity, behaviour, learning and professional influence within an organisation?"

**Date:** September 2021

**Researcher:** Brendan Coulson

Please read and confirm your consent to participating in this study by ticking the appropriate box(es) and signing and dating this form

<b>Declarations</b>	<b>Yes/No</b>
I confirm that the purpose of the study has been explained to me, that I have been given information about it in writing, and that I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw at any time before 7 <sup>th</sup> April 2023 without giving any reason and without recourse.	
I understand that failure to withdraw before 7 <sup>th</sup> April 2023 may result in my anonymised opinions/recommendations being used within this study	
I understand that my participation will be audio recorded and then transcribed, and my identity will be visible to the researcher during the semi structured interviews, and to all other participants during the focus groups.	
I give permission for the semi-structured interviews to be transcribed by the researcher and used to inform the study, on the understanding that my identity will be anonymised.	
I give permission for my participation in the focus groups to be transcribed by the researcher and used to inform the study, on the understanding that my identity will be anonymised.	
I understand that my identity maybe visible to other participants during my involvement within the focus group discussions.	
I will keep the identity of any of the other participants confidential.	
I give permission for any responses that I provide in the questionnaires to be used by the researcher to inform the study, on the understanding that my identity will be anonymised.	
I give permission for any responses that I provide throughout this research to be directly quoted within the main study, and for my responses to be analysed and discussed within the main study.	
On the understanding that I will be emailed directly, I give permission for communication and the questionnaires to be sent to the email address that I provide to the researcher.	
I agree to take part in this study.	





Thank you for taking the time to consider your participation in this study, for further information, I have attached the study's information sheet and consent form. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Kind Regards  
Brendan Coulson

**I intend to email participants that have agreed to take part in the study with the following:**  
Dear XXXX

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study, if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact [Brendan.coulson@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:Brendan.coulson@ntu.ac.uk) (Researcher). I will contact you within the next two weeks to confirm dates and times of the semi structured interviews, focus groups, and to confirm receipt of the questionnaire.

Your participation is entirely voluntary, there is no pressure to take part in this study. You will still be free to withdraw before 7<sup>th</sup> April 2023 without giving any reason and without recourse. If you decide not to take part, or to withdraw, please do so by sending an email to the researcher. Please refer to the information sheet provided to you (see attached) for further information.

Your employment and apprenticeship will not be affected by your choice of participation or withdrawal within this study.

Thank you again for your participation in this study.

Kind Regards  
Brendan Coulson  
**LinkedIn**

**General promotion if the uptake is less than 6 participants by 1<sup>st</sup> October 2021**

Are you currently employed?

Are you about to start an apprenticeship as part of your organisational training and development programme?

If you answered, 'yes' to both questions then please let me know if you would like to participate in a study that focuses on "How does an existing staff member becoming an apprentice impact on their social identity, behaviour, learning and professional influence within an organisation?"

**Please send me a private message to find out more.**

**NTU PGR Data Management Plan**

<b>Full name:</b>	<i>Brendan Coulson</i>	
<b>Unique ID:</b>	N0882743	
<b>Provisional project title:</b>	<i>"How does an existing staff member becoming an apprentice impact on their social identity, behaviour, learning and professional influence within an organisation?"</i>	
<b>Project start:</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> January 2020	Project end: 1 <sup>st</sup> January 2028	
<b>Project context:</b> <b>Provide a short description of the circumstance surrounding the research project:</b>		
<b>What are you studying?</b>		
This research focuses on established staff members that become an apprentice during their contract of employment, as opposed to those employees who are employed from the outset as an apprentice.		
In order to develop a profound understanding of the apprentices' experience, it is my intention to conduct this study over a three-year period. It will be a longitudinal study using qualitative methods with cohorts of approximately 6 individual apprentices per year; totalling approximately 18 apprentices. The qualitative methods include two semi-structure interviews, two focus groups and a reflective dairy that will be maintained by each apprentice.		
<b>Where is the research taking place and/or data being collected?</b>		
Due to Covid-19 and environmental factors, I intend to use an NTU platform such as Microsoft Teams to conduct the semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The diaries will also be managed using an NTU platform.		
<b>Is this an individual or collaborative research project?</b>		

This is an individual research project conducted by me, Brendan Coulson, to inform my PhD thesis. I am supervised by a Director of studies, Dr Rowena Hill and Co-supervisor Dr Ruth Richards and will also be reviewed by an Independent Assessor, Dr Sue Dymoke (NTU).

**Is it based in a particular department/ part of a research group? Does it involve an agreement with any external institutions or businesses?**

With exception of the Doctoral School of which I am enrolled to as a part-time PhD student and the Institute of Education at NTU that I am employed with, this research is not part of any departmental or research group. In addition, withstanding facilitation to apprentices, this study does not involve working with any external Institutions or businesses.

**How is it funded?**

The study is funded by the Nottingham Institute of Education which is part of Nottingham Trent University (NTU). This funding allows the study to be undertaken as a piece of independent, academic research which will form the main part of my research towards completion of my PhD thesis. The funding was agreed as part of the Institute's commitment to staff development and not as a specifically funded project commissioned by the Institute of Education.

**1. Defining your data**

**a) Describe your data and how you will be working with it**

**Describe the methods and standards for data creation:**

**What data will you collect or create during the project?**

Using Microsoft Teams, I will conduct/facilitate two one-hour semi-structured interviews, two 1.5-hour focus groups and to maintain a monthly (minimum) diary that captures your experience during the apprenticeship. These will be recorded and transcribed. Once the recordings are transcribed, they will be deleted and erased from NTU's systems in accordance to NTU's Ethics code of practice.

The transcripts will be fully anonymised, any information that identifies the participant, their organisation and apprenticeship provider, or that gives any clues to their identity, will be removed.

**Is your data qualitative or quantitative, output by a device or manually compiled?**

It will be a longitudinal study using online qualitative methods with cohorts of approximately 6 individual apprentices per year; totalling approximately 18 apprentices. The data will be analysed using NTU's digital application/software.

**What physical data will you study?**

N/A

**What data will be 'created' digitally?**

Data will be created digitally using NTU's systems, such as Microsoft Teams. This will result in several recordings and a digitalised password protected diary kept by each apprentice.

**What type of data are you capturing or working with? Is it personal or special category data? Is it confidential or commercially sensitive data?**

The study focuses on the apprentices' experience; therefore, they may provide me with information about them, their organisation and apprenticeship provider. However, I will not seek information about the participant, the organisation and apprenticeship provider outside the scope of this study.

The recordings, transcript and findings will be handled only by myself, in line with data protection principles and NTU's approved research protocol. All electronic files will be kept on NTU's Data Store. Participants, their organisation and apprenticeship provider will not be named or otherwise identified in any publication arising from this study or from any unpublished opinions or information, either by name or position.

**Are you using pre-existing datasets? If so, what are these? How will you access them? What will you be doing with them? Will you be creating new data from them?**

N/A

**b) What formats and software will you use?**

**Note here any software that you will need in order to collect, generate and/or analyse your data. Include also all of the formats that you will be saving data in at the different stages of your research.**

**Applications include:**

- Microsoft Teams
- Microsoft Word (.docx)
- Microsoft Excel (.xlsx)
- Microsoft Visio (.vsdx)

**Additional Detail:**

- All recordings will be created in Microsoft Teams, these recordings will be saved as MP4 files on NTU's secure network.
- Analysis of results and report findings will be created using Microsoft Office applications (listed above), these will be individually password protected and stored on NTU's secure systems.
- The diary entries will be created using Microsoft Teams and Office applications (listed above), which again are stored centrally on NTU's Data Store and shared using a secure link to each participant. Each document will be password protected.

**c) How much data do you expect to generate?**

**This will inform your storage arrangements; therefore it is sensible to try to calculate the amount of data you will generate. It is possible that the volume of data will fluctuate in the course of your research, so account for the peak volume in your estimations.**

I expect to record no more than a total of 36 x 1-hour semi structured interviews and 6 x 1.5-hour focus groups; these will be stored as MP3s of about 80 MB each. I will transcribe these into Microsoft Word (.docx), Excel (.xlsx) and Visio (.vsdx) documents of about 150 KB each.

**2. Compliance & data ownership**

**a) Is some/all data subject to any institutional, legal, ethical, commercial conditions?**

I have consulted the following policies

- [The NTU RDM Policy](#)
- [Data Security- Portable Devices and Media Policy](#)
- [Information Classification Policy](#)
- [NTU Records Retention Policy](#)
- [NTU Research Ethics Policy](#)

My research will be conducted in accordance to the British Educational Research Association (BERA) guidelines.

[Section 2b](#) outlines the conditions and what I will do to comply with them.

**b) What do you need to do to comply with these obligations?**

- Access to the data must be restricted to my Director of Studies, Dr Rowena Hill, Co-Supervisor, Dr Ruth Richards and myself.
- The data underlying published results must be kept for at least ten years.
- As a PhD student and employee of Nottingham Trent University, this study is subject to NTU's policies and procedures.
- I will obtain the informed consent from participants to implement my plans for data storage, retention and sharing (as outlined in sections 3, 4 and 5).
- My research involves collecting the following personal, sensitive and confidential data regarding a participant:
  - Name, mobile number, personal email address, name of employer, name of apprenticeship provider.
  - Previous academic achievements
  - Socio-economic background
  - Their perceptions of apprenticeship courses, impact on their occupational standing within their employment, apprenticeship training experience, how they view their social identity, their opinions of how they are viewed within the organisation that

they work for, their opinion on how the training provider views them in terms of their social identity and finally, how does the apprenticeship impact on their behaviour.

- Their opinion regarding any communities of practice that they are/have been part of

I will put several safeguards in place to protect participants' privacy and secure data. These are detailed in sections 3, 4 and 5.

**c) Who owns the data?**

- I own the rights to the data that I generate during the project. Therefore, I can use the data during and after my studies in the ways I describe in Sections 3, 4 & 5 of this Data Management Plan.

**3. Working with your data**

**a) Where will you store your data?**

- "Active research" data storage will be managed entirely through NTU's Data-Store. Data will not be stored on any other platform outside of this.
- All specified instruments will be used via NTU's secure systems and will not be stored on any temporary storage devices.
- All gathered data will not exceed NTU's allocation of 5 TB on NTU's OneDrive, therefore no allocation of money will be required for data storage.
- I can confirm that I have applied to use the NTU Data Store by completing the Active Research Data Storage Request Form, this was submitted on the 28<sup>th</sup> August 2020
- All documents stored on the NTU systems will be password protected.
- I will strictly be working within the BERA guidelines to ensure that the confidentiality, anonymity and security of the research data, both during and after the project is maintained.
- I will anonymise organisations and participants involved within my study. This includes changing or omitting any identifying information in any write up of the research programme. All my research data will be stored centrally on NTU's secure systems and I will only use NTU systems to analyse the research findings.
- Once any recordings are transcribed, they will be deleted and erased from NTU's systems in accordance to NTU's Ethics code of practice. All transcripts will be fully anonymised, any information that identifies the participant, the organisation and apprenticeship provider will be removed.

**b) How will you back-up your data?**

- NTU's Data Store automatically backed-ups all data, no data will be stored on any other devices.
- No physical documentation will be used to gather data therefore there are no considerations of this type of media.

**c) Who else is allowed to access this data during the project?**

Only my supervisory team should have read only access to my data during the project: Director of Studies, Dr [Rowena.hill@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:Rowena.hill@ntu.ac.uk) and Co-Supervisor, Dr [Ruth.richards@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:Ruth.richards@ntu.ac.uk)

**d) How will you organise your data folders?**

Data and documentation files will be held in separate folders. Data files will be organised by date, then research activity using this format: [YYYYMMDD]\_ [INSTRUMENT TYPE] e.g. [20200401\_Focus Groups]

**e) How will you name your files?**

To enable me to sort documents chronologically and to easily locate files I am intending on using this format: [YYYYMMDD]\_ [Participant Number] \_ [Version No] e.g. [20200401\_P1\_1]. These files will be stored with the relevant data folder depending upon the activity.

**f) How will you manage different versions of your files?**

This is a small-scale study; therefore, a numeric version number will be applied to the end of each created file e.g. [YYYYMMDD]\_ [Participant Number] \_ [Version No] i.e. [20200401\_P1\_1].

**g) How will you ensure your data is understandable to others?**

**Thorough and consistent documentation of data offers numerous advantages to you during your project, as well for anybody who might review/ use the data in the future. Consider:**

All participants will be given a number in this format, Participant number [P] e.g. P1, P2 etc. I will keep a log of activity through an excel spreadsheet that will be password protected and stored on NTU's Data Store. This log will be used to keep metadata regarding any activity that I conduct and further details where necessary. All data will be anonymised as previously discussed. This includes changing or omitting any identifying information about the participants, their organisation and training provider.

**4. Archiving your data**

**a) What data should be kept, or destroyed, after the end of your project?**

- NTU requires that I keep the data supporting my thesis at the end of the project and make it openly available with as few restrictions as possible. Only anonymised research data will be retained at the end of the study. This will include interview and focus group transcripts, reflective diary entries as well as collated and analysed data with accompanying documentation.
- Once any recordings are transcribed, they will be deleted and erased from NTU's systems in accordance to NTU's Ethics code of practice.

**b) Where will you archive your data?**

- After consulting [re3data.org](http://re3data.org), the finalised dataset will be deposited in Zenodo.
- The data repository will assign a DOI to the dataset for inclusion in:
  - the data access statement of my thesis, and any other publications associated with my project;
  - the metadata record for the dataset that will be added to NTU's IRep (see Section 5a).

**c) When will you archive your data?**

- Data will be deposited in the repository prior to my thesis being submitted for examination.
- Data that will be made publicly available (see Sections 5b and 5c) will be deposited under an embargo until the final, approved version of thesis is submitted to IRep before the conferment of my degree.

**d) How long will the data be archived for?**

**The NTU Records Retention Schedule states that research data should be kept for 10 years, or longer according to funder policy.**

- In accordance with the NTU Records Retention Schedule, the research data will be retained for 10 years from the date of deposit.

**5. Sharing your data**

<p><b>a) How will others learn that your data exists?</b></p> <p><b>My data will be made discoverable in several ways:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Centre for Education Statistics is fully searchable and indexed in Google Scholar and directly through the ZENODO website.</li> <li>• My thesis will include a data citation and data access statement, so readers will know where and how to access the underlying data.</li> <li>• After depositing my project data in ZENODO I will register my data with NTU by submitting a PGR Data Registry Form. A metadata record for my research data will be created in NTU IRep. This record will offer a full description of my data, as well as linking directly to the record of my thesis. The thesis record will also link to the dataset metadata record so that people who locate my thesis will also be directed to its underpinning data.</li> </ul>
<p><b>b) Which data will be accessible to others?</b></p> <p>All my data may be shared openly upon submission of my final, approved thesis to IRep.</p>
<p><b>c) Who will you share your data with and under what conditions?</b></p> <p>Once the thesis is completed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ The anonymised data will be available to download from Zenodo under a <a href="#">CC-BY 4.0</a> licence.</li> </ul>
<p><b>How will others access your data?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data will be available for immediate download via Zenodo</li> </ul>
<p><b>6. Implementing your DMP</b></p>
<p><b>a) How often will this plan be reviewed and updated?</b></p> <p>My supervisory team and I will review this plan at on a 6 monthly cycle and I will update this plan as required.</p>
<p><b>b) What actions have you identified from the rest of this plan?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share this plan with my supervisors and make any necessary amendments before submitting it with the RD1PA.</li> <li>• Arrange for the secure storage of personal, confidential data by completing and submitting the Active Research Data Storage request form. – <b>Completed 28<sup>th</sup> August 2020</b></li> <li>• Request access to research team data storage. – <b>Completed 28<sup>th</sup> August 2020</b></li> <li>• Write a participant information sheet and informed consent form using guidance provided by the College Ethics Committee and the UK Data Service. – <b>Completed 27<sup>th</sup> August 2020</b></li> <li>• Ensure that anonymised research data will be retained and made available for future reuse, but that all information that might identify them will be destroyed.</li> <li>• Ensure that I deposit my project data in ZENODO</li> <li>• Learn how to anonymise my data so that it can be shared.</li> <li>• Once I have been allocated Data Storage for the purposes of Active Research, I will ensure to use the correct naming conventions as previously discussed.</li> </ul>
<p><b>c) What support/ information do you need to complete these actions?</b></p> <p><b>I will work with the following resources and team to ensure that I am confident in completing all the necessary actions and to adhere to this Data Management Plan.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">NTU Library RDM webpages</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">UK Data Service</a></li> <li>• NTU Research Data Management Officer at <a href="mailto:LIBResearchTeam@ntu.ac.uk">LIBResearchTeam@ntu.ac.uk</a></li> <li>• RDM workshops in the RDF programme. The <a href="#">Researcher Development brochure</a> contains the dates of available sessions and instructions on how to book a place.</li> <li>• Online tutorial: <a href="#">MANTRA-Research Data Management Training</a></li> </ul>

#### Questionnaire Method

This questionnaire will be a structured set of qualitative questions that will be sent to the participants at three fixed stages of their apprenticeship journey, namely: on-programme, gateway, and

completion. Participants can purposefully consider their feelings, reactions, thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, responses, and experiences

The questionnaire has been developed online using Qualtrics which is a reputable online survey database used widely within research. The participants' responses will enable the researcher to identify trends and variations in their lived experiences throughout the apprenticeship journey.

**Questionnaires:**

<b>Instrument</b>	<b>Apprenticeship Journey</b>	<b>Questions</b>
Questionnaire: Fixed signal-contingent: Triggered by the researcher at key interval one	Key Interval One (Start of the apprenticeship)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Please confirm whether you were already employed into your role before starting an apprenticeship?</li> <li>• Please can you explain what is your general perception of apprenticeships?</li> <li>• From your response to question 1, can you describe what experience and/or information has influenced this perception?</li> <li>• Again, from your response in question 1, can you explain how your perception of apprenticeships could impact on your norms, values, and beliefs within your organisation? (e.g., your willingness to take on responsibilities, speak out etc.)</li> <li>• Please explain how your perception of apprenticeships could influence the way you see yourself in your professional spaces at work.</li> <li>• Could you describe your apprenticeship and what you hope to achieve from the training?</li> <li>• Please describe how you believe you are performing within your job role.</li> <li>• Describe how you reached this conclusion?</li> <li>• Other comments</li> </ul>
Questionnaire: Fixed signal-contingent: Triggered by the researcher at key interval two	Key Interval Two (On-programme)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Please describe whether your perception of apprenticeship generally has changed?</li> <li>• Could you explain how your current perception of apprenticeships impacts on your work</li> <li>• Please explain how your current perception of apprenticeships influenced the way you view yourself at work.</li> <li>• Please describe how you believe you are performing within your job role.</li> <li>• Describe how you reached this conclusion?</li> <li>• Other comments</li> </ul>
Questionnaire: Fixed signal-contingent: Triggered by the researcher at key interval three	Key Interval Three (End Point Assessment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having completed your apprenticeship, describe your perception of an apprenticeship generally compared to you when you first started the apprenticeship</li> <li>• On reflection, did being an apprentice impact your work?</li> <li>• On reflection, how did being an apprentice influence the way you see yourself at work?</li> <li>• On-reflection, please describe how you believe you performed within your job role, during your apprenticeship?</li> <li>• Describe how you reached this conclusion?</li> </ul>

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

The researcher will use the participant's previous responses and the semi-structured interview questions to provoke a conversation.

**On-programme (After completion of 'Start' Questionnaire)**

At this stage apprentices have started their apprenticeship journey, and are starting to form their identify, perceptions and experiences of being an apprentice.

1. Please can you start by telling me a little bit about yourself?

2. Could you describe what your perception of apprenticeships are generally, please?
  - a. What do you feel has contributed to that perception?
  - b. Apprenticeships are funded by the employer, or through the ESFA (Education, Skills Funding Agency), can you explain whether this has influenced your perception of apprenticeships?
3. Can you describe how the apprenticeship could support your personal development and career prospects?
4. Please could you describe to me the way you see yourself in your professional spaces at work?
  - a. Does that differ to how you would describe yourself in your personal life?
5. Please can you describe yourself at work, think about your norms, values, and belief?
6. Describe how you think learning on the job will support you to make progress within your job role and on your apprenticeship?
7. Could you now explain how you feel that becoming an apprentice will impact you and your job role?
8. Could you describe any social groups that you feel you are currently engaged with?
9. Describe any new social groups that you hope to be a part of, as a result of being an apprentice?
10. One quality of these groups is the way in which the group can learn from each other. How do you feel that being part of this kind of social group might influence your learning?
11. Please could you describe how you currently learn on the job?
  - a. Could you explain how you use reflection when developing new knowledge/skill?
  - b. Explain how you think learning on the job will support you to make progress within your job role and on your apprenticeship?
12. What methods of learning work best for you?
13. How do you think you will learn during the apprenticeship?
  14. Please describe how you believe you are performing within your job role.
    - a. Explain how you reached this conclusion?
15. Other comments

**Completion (After completion of 'End Point' Questionnaire (validation and to build on responses))**

The apprentices should have now passed the EPA; therefore, they have met the knowledge, skills and behaviours as set out in the apprenticeship standards. The apprentice has now concluded the apprenticeship and is deemed as competent within their occupational pathway.

1. Reflecting over your apprenticeship experience, could you start by describing any differences of your view of apprenticeships between the time you started and now?
2. Overall, can you describe how being an apprentice made you feel?
  - a. Could you explain how this impacted your learning on the job?
  - b. Could you explain how this view impacted your learning off the job?
3. Please could you describe how you learned on the job?
  - a. Could you explain how you used reflection when developing new knowledge/skill?
  - b. Explain how you think learning on the job supported you to make progress within your job role and on your apprenticeship?
4. Since completing your apprenticeship, can you describe what has changed within your job role?
5. Please explain what social groups are you still part of since completing your apprenticeship?
6. On reflection, please describe how the apprenticeship has supported your personal development and career prospects?



7. Overall, please can you describe whether you recommend an apprenticeship to upskill an existing employee?
8. Other comments

## Appendix Two: Focus Group Schedules

### Focus Group Schedule: Completion

#### Overview:

**Platform:** Microsoft Teams

This focus group will reflect on whether you have changed your view regarding apprenticeships from your initial pre-programme perceptions, and to discuss your lived experiences during your apprenticeship, in-particular how being an apprentice impacted on your social identity, behaviour, and your occupational standing.

#### Ground rules:

1. You are free to keep your camera off during the focus group, your identity is visible to the facilitator and the other participants. All participants are reminded to keep the identity of other participants confidential
2. No direct reference to a training provider or employer
3. Please allow others to provide their perspective without interruption
4. The facilitator will chair the focus group to enable all participants' views to be heard
5. Please use respectful language when participating in the focus group discussion
6. Participants have already completed a consent form; further confirmation will be sought to confirm that all participants agree with the session being recorded
7. Refer the candidates to the participant information and consent form for further clarification on their rights and the research process

#### Facilitation Steps:

1. Ensure the ground rules are explained
2. Inform the participants of the focus group's overview
3. Once the ground rules are satisfied, start the recording
4. Open discussion by asking has your view of an apprenticeship changed as a result of completing one?
  - a. What has influenced this view?
  - b. Do you think the general views of your colleagues have changed since you have completed an apprenticeship?
5. On reflection, did an apprenticeship meet your initial expectations?
  - a. How did you learn, did this meet your initial expectations?
  - b. What in-work/apprenticeship social groups were you part of during your apprenticeship?
  - c. Did these groups support your learning?
  - d. Did you get excluded from any groupings as a result of being an apprentice?
  - e. What did you achieve from doing an apprenticeship?
6. On reflection, considering your view and the general perceptions of apprenticeships:
  - a. Did being an apprentice impact on how others viewed you?
  - b. Did being an apprentice change the way you were during work?
  - c. Did you get treated differently as a result of being an apprentice?
  - d. Did the apprenticeship improve your career prospects?
7. Now that you have completed an apprenticeship, has your perception changed, would you recommend an apprenticeship to upskill an existing employee?
8. Activity 3: Using Kolb (1984) Four Stage Cycle as a framework, firstly as an apprentice, and then as an employee: Discuss how aspects of learning on the job impacted on your identity at work, and in training, progress, your social groups

- a. Display PowerPoint on-screen
  - b. Ask whether the participants can see the PowerPoint
  - c. Go through Instructions and Slides
9. Thank you for taking part. I hope you found the discussions useful. I would just like to ask if there is anything that anyone wishes to add before we close our discussions?

**Standard prompts:**

1. Can you tell me more about that please?
2. Is this how other people feel?
3. Do others share this view?
4. Can you talk about why you think that?
5. Can you talk about what that means for you?

**Focus Group Schedule: On-programme**

**Overview:**

**Platform:** Microsoft Teams

This focus group will concentrate on your initial perceptions regarding apprenticeships, in-particular how these perceptions were formed and how these could impact on your social identity, behaviour and learning within your occupation.

**Ground rules:**

8. You are free to keep your camera off during the focus group, your identity is visible to the facilitator and the other participants. All participants are reminded to keep the identity of other participants confidential
9. No direct reference to a training provider or employer
10. Please allow others to provide their perspective without interruption
11. The facilitator will chair the focus group to enable all participants' views to be heard
12. Please use respectful language when participating in the focus group discussion
13. Participants have already completed a consent form; further confirmation will be sought to confirm that all participants agree with the session being recorded
14. Refer the candidates to the participant information and consent form for further clarification on their rights and the research process

**Facilitation Steps:**

10. Ensure the ground rules are explained
11. Inform the participants of the focus group's overview
12. Once the ground rules are satisfied, start the recording
13. I would like to find out more about why you have decided to do an apprenticeship.
  - a. How do you think you will learn?
  - b. What do you hope to achieve from doing an apprenticeship?
14. Activity 1: Prompt Cards, using paraphrased statements of perceptions taken from Questionnaire 'On-programme'
  - a. Display prompts through sharing screen
  - b. Confirm that all participants can see each prompt
15. Ok, considering the perception presented on the prompt card, putting yourself in that person's position:
  - a. How do you think being an apprentice will impact on how others view you?
  - b. Do you think being an apprentice will change the way you are during work?
  - c. Do you think that being an apprentice will change the way you are treated at work?

16. Now that we have discussed apprenticeships, has your perception changed?
17. Activity 2: Which groups of people support you at work, and which support you with your apprenticeship? Word Cloud: e.g., Online Social Group, Professional Membership, Apprenticeship Peers, Work Colleagues, Other.
- a. Display word cloud through sharing screen
  - b. Confirm that all participants can see the word cloud
  - c. Are any social groups missing? If so, facilitator to add to word cloud
18. Ok, considering the groups presented on the word cloud
- a. Please describe which groups you engaged with before starting an apprenticeship
  - b. Explain whether you still engage with these groups?
  - c. How does being an apprentice impact on your contributions within these groups?
  - d. Explain if you are part of any new groups because of being an apprentice
  - e. Describe how being part of these social groups supports you in work and on your apprenticeship
19. Thank you for taking part. I hope you found the discussions useful. I would just like to ask if there is anything that anyone wishes to add before we close our discussions?

**Standard prompts:**

4. Can you tell me more about that please?
5. Is this how other people feel?
6. Do others share this view?
6. Can you talk about why you think that?
7. Can you talk about what that means for you?

# Appendix Three: Padlet



padlet.com/brendancoulson/a3xvtrmy6ezl0934i

## Focus Group: On-programme

This focus group will concentrate on your initial perceptions regarding apprenticeships, in-particular how these perceptions were formed and how these could impact on your social identity, behaviour and learning within your occupation.

COULSON, BRENDAN MAR 18, 2022 10:17AM

### Welcome to the focus group session

Please complete the activities marked as "Pre-Session Activities" before the session. Thank you once again for your participation in this study.

This focus group will concentrate on your initial perceptions regarding apprenticeships, in-particular how these perceptions were formed and how these could impact on your social identity, behaviour and learning within your occupation.

### Ground Rules :-)

To maintain anonymity, each participant will be required to keep their cameras off and take on a pseudonym. - (Optional)

No direct reference to a training provider or employer

Please allow others to provide their prospective without interruption

The facilitator will chair the focus group to enable all participants' views to be heard

Please use respectful language when participating in the focus group discussion

Participants have already completed a consent form; further confirmation will be sought to confirm that all participants agree with the session being recorded

Refer the candidates to the participant information and consent form for further clarification on their rights and the research process

### "Pre-Session Activities" Activity One: Going Over Old Ground - Please give a brief statement for the below:

I would like to find out more about why you have decided to do an apprenticeship: (please write in the comment section below)

*I wanted to validate my skills knowledge and experience. I wanted to prove to myself I could do it. — ANONYMOUS*

*It was fully funded! I also wanted to prove to myself that I had academic skills to back up my experience — ANONYMOUS*

*I wanted to train to whilst receiving a salary and not paying university fees. — ANONYMOUS*

*It was/is a condition of employment. Which is fabulous!! I started as soon as possible. — ANONYMOUS*

*I wanted to do a career change and thought an apprenticeship would be an interesting way of doing this as I had enjoyed my academic experiences before. — ANONYMOUS*

*I wanted to take the next step in my career and lack of experience was holding me back, so I thought studying in this area would help make that step. — ANONYMOUS*

### "Pre-Session Activities", Activity Two: Please click below and rate which perception applied / applies to you

**Voting**  
Vote on a Mentimeter question  
MENTIMETER



### "Pre-Session Activities", Activity Three: Rank the following perceptions regarding the support you thought you would receive

**Voting**  
Vote on a Mentimeter question  
MENTIMETER



### Results - Live Update, Activity One

# Final Focus Group

This focus group will reflect on whether you have changed your view regarding apprenticeships from your initial pre-programme perceptions, and to discuss your lived experiences during your apprenticeship, in particular how being an apprentice impacted on your social identity, behaviour, and your occupational standing.

COULSON, BRENDAN JUN 10, 2022 09:02AM

## Ground rules:

1. You are free to keep your camera off during the focus group, your identity is visible to the facilitator and the other participants. All participants are reminded to keep the identity of other participants confidential
2. No direct reference to a training provider or employer
3. Please allow others to provide their prospective without interruption
4. The facilitator will chair the focus group to enable all participants' views to be heard
5. Please use respectful language when participating in the focus group discussion
6. Participants have already completed a consent form; further confirmation will be sought to confirm that all participants agree with the session being recorded
7. Refer the candidates to the participant information and consent form for further clarification on their rights and the research process

Please add any comments here to add any further points  
— COULSON, BRENDAN

## Activity Three

**Voting**  
Vote on a Mentimeter question  
MENTIMETER



Please add any comments here to add any further points  
— COULSON, BRENDAN

## Questions for Discussion

Explain how you learned new ideas and implemented them in the workplace as a result of your apprenticeship?

Describe the differences in your experience compared to when you were not on an apprenticeship?

Did your learning style change according to whether you were on the job learning or off the job training? If so, how?

Did/Does being an apprentice impact on you? If so, how?

Do you find you can still fully engage in both your job and the apprenticeship?

Did/Do you get treated any differently as a result of being an apprentice?

What advice would you give an employer who is think about allowing their staff to become apprentices?

What advice would you give a co-worker who is planning on starting an apprenticeship?

Please add any comments here to add any further points  
— COULSON, BRENDAN

## Activity One

**Voting**  
Vote on a Mentimeter question  
MENTIMETER



Please add any comments here to add any further points  
— COULSON, BRENDAN

## Activity Two

**Voting**  
Vote on a Mentimeter question  
MENTIMETER



# Appendix Four: Pilot Study: Semi-Structured Questions

## Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this pilot, only your opinions regarding the instruments will be used in the main study, any responses you provide when piloting the research instruments will not be used within the findings of this research project. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact [Brendan.coulson@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:Brendan.coulson@ntu.ac.uk) (Researcher).

## Semi-Structured Interviews

A semi-structured interview is a method which incorporates both open-ended and more theoretically driven questions, this allows for variation in the use of questions to draw the participant more fully into the topic that is being researched. This approach elicits responses grounded in the experience of the participant.<sup>1</sup>

Semi-structured interviews will be used at three intervals during the apprentices' learning journey, these include on-programme, assessment gateway and completion (see figure one). The intention is to capture the participant's responses overtime to enable the researcher to identify trends and variations within the responses. Please review the proposed semi-structured interviews and consider the questions that are outlined in the "[Questions for you to consider](#)" section of this document. Thank you.

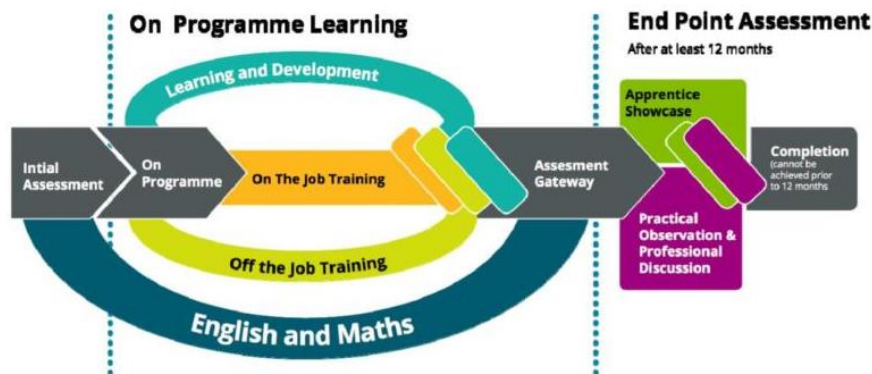


Figure One: Apprenticeship Journey, Pearson (2017)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Galletta, A., Cross, W. 2013. Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview and Beyond: From Research Design to Analysis and Publication. NYU Press.

<sup>2</sup> Pearson. 2017. Customer Service Practitioner, Apprenticeship Standard. Pearson [online]. Available at: <https://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/new-apprenticeships/insight-documents/Gated%20content%20only/Customer%20Service%20webinar.pdf> [Accessed 15 April 2021]

**On-programme (Start)**

At this stage apprentices have started their apprenticeship journey, but at an early stage of their learning. This is an opportunity to identify their initial perceptions and experiences of being an apprentice.

16. Please can you start by telling me a little bit about yourself?
17. Could you describe what your perception of apprenticeships are generally, please?
  - a. What do you feel has contributed to that perception?
18. Can you describe how the apprenticeship could support your personal development and career prospects?
19. Please could you describe to me the way you see yourself in your professional spaces at work?
  - a. Does that differ to how you would describe yourself in your personal life?
20. Please can you describe your behaviour at work?
21. Could you now explain how you feel that becoming an apprentice will impact you and your job role?
22. Could you describe any communities of practice that you feel you are currently engaged with? (Researcher to explain communities of practice)
23. Describe any new community of practice that you hope to be a part of, as a result of being an apprentice?
24. One quality of these communities is the way in which the group can learn from each other. This is sometimes called Social Learning. How do you feel that being part of this kind of social learning might influence your learning?
25. Please could you describe how you currently learn on the job? (Researcher to explain experiential learning)
  - a. Could you explain how you use reflection when developing new knowledge/skill?
26. What methods of learning work best for you?
27. How do you think you will learn during the apprenticeship?
28. Other comments

**Assessment Gateway**

At this stage the apprentice's employer and training provider review whether the apprentice has met the minimum requirements of the apprenticeship standard and have reached the occupational competence to demonstrate the knowledge, skills and behaviours required to pass the End Point Assessment (EPA).

1. Please can you start by telling me about how you are progressing with your apprenticeship?
2. Reflecting over your apprenticeship experience, could you start by describing any differences of your view of apprenticeships between the time you started and now?
3. Please could you describe how being an apprentice impacted on you within your occupation?
  - a. Describe what it was like being an apprentice in the workplace?
4. How did being an apprentice influence the way you see yourself at work?
5. How did you learn during your apprenticeship?
6. What elements of learning worked well and which didn't?
7. Please describe the process of learning on and off the job?
  - a. What did this involve?
- b. Could you explain how you used reflection when developing new knowledge/skill? (Researcher to explain experiential learning)
8. What communities of practice supported you during your apprenticeship?
  - a. How did being part of this kind of social learning influence your learning?

9. To date, please describe how the apprenticeship has supported your personal development and career prospects?
10. Other comments

**Completion**

The apprentices should have now passed the EPA; therefore, they have met the knowledge, skills and behaviours as set out in the apprenticeship standards. The apprentice has now concluded the apprenticeship and is deemed as competed within their occupational pathway.

9. Reflecting over your apprenticeship experience, could you start by describing any differences of your view of apprenticeships between the time you started and now?
10. Overall, can you describe how being an apprentice made you feel?
  - a. Could you explain how this impacted your learning on the job?
  - b. Could you explain how view impacted your learning off the job?
11. Since completing your apprenticeship, can you describe what has changed within your job role?
12. Please explain what communities of practice are you still part of since completing your apprenticeship?
13. On reflection, please describe how the apprenticeship has supported your personal development and career prospects?
14. Overall, please can you describe whether you recommend an apprenticeship to upskill an existing employee?
15. Other comments

**Questions for you to consider:**

These are some of the questions that will be used as guide by the researcher when asking for your feedback, please do start to consider your responses.

- Focusing on the semi-structured interviews, firstly can you describe how the frequency provides (or otherwise) adequate opportunity to capture the apprentices' responses throughout the apprenticeship journey.
  - Can you explain whether the questions provide adequate coverage to enable the research aims to be answered?
  - Do you have other comments regarding the semi-structured interview method and proposed instrument?
- Thank you for taking part in this pilot study, do you have any other comments that you would like to conclude with?

**Notes:** You can use this space to add any responses you have from reviewing the semi-structured interviews:



# Appendix Five: Pilot Study: Research Materials

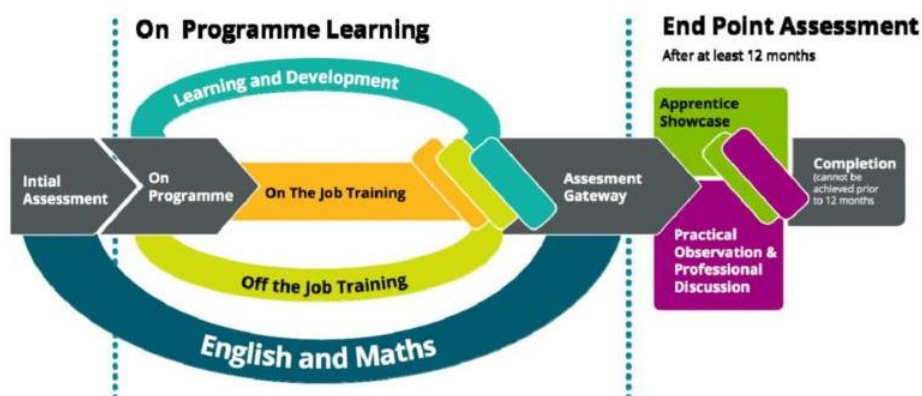
## Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this pilot, only your opinions regarding the instruments will be used in the main study, any responses you provide when piloting the research instruments will not be used within the findings of this research project. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact [Brendan.coulson@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:Brendan.coulson@ntu.ac.uk) (Researcher).

## Semi-Structured Interviews

A semi-structured interview is a method which incorporates both open-ended and more theoretically driven questions, this allows for variation in the use of questions to draw the participant more fully into the topic that is being researched. This approach elicits responses grounded in the experience of the participant.<sup>3</sup>

Semi-structured interviews will be used at three intervals during the apprentices' learning journey, these include on-programme, assessment gateway and completion (see figure one). The intention is to capture the participant's responses overtime to enable the researcher to identify trends and variations within the responses. Please review the proposed semi-structured interviews and consider the questions that are outlined in the "[Questions for you to consider](#)" section of this document. Thank you.



**Figure One:** Apprenticeship Journey, Pearson (2017)<sup>4</sup>

### On-programme (Start)

At this stage apprentices have started their apprenticeship journey, but at an early stage of their learning. This is an opportunity to identify their initial perceptions and experiences of being an apprentice.

29. Please can you start by telling me a little bit about yourself?

30. Could you describe what your perception of apprenticeships are generally, please?

<sup>3</sup> Galletta, A., Cross, W. 2013. Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview and Beyond: From Research Design to Analysis and Publication. NYU Press.

<sup>4</sup> Pearson. 2017. Customer Service Practitioner, Apprenticeship Standard. Pearson [online]. Available at: <https://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/new-apprenticeships/insight-documents/Gated%20content%20only/Customer%20Service%20webinar.pdf> [Accessed 15 April 2021]

- a. What do you feel has contributed to that perception?
- 31. Can you describe how the apprenticeship could support your personal development and career prospects?
- 32. Please could you describe to me the way you see yourself in your professional spaces at work?
  - a. Does that differ to how you would describe yourself in your personal life?
- 33. Please can you describe your behaviour at work?
- 34. Could you now explain how you feel that becoming an apprentice will impact you and your job role?
- 35. Could you describe any communities of practice that you feel you are currently engaged with? (Researcher to explain communities of practice)
- 36. Describe any new community of practice that you hope to be a part of, as a result of being an apprentice?
- 37. One quality of these communities is the way in which the group can learn from each other. This is sometimes called Social Learning. How do you feel that being part of this kind of social learning might influence your learning?
- 38. Please could you describe how you currently learn on the job? (Researcher to explain experiential learning)
  - a. Could you explain how you use reflection when developing new knowledge/skill?
- 39. What methods of learning work best for you?
- 40. How do you think you will learn during the apprenticeship?
- 41. Other comments

**Assessment Gateway**

At this stage the apprentice's employer and training provider review whether the apprentice has met the minimum requirements of the apprenticeship standard and have reached the occupational competence to demonstrate the knowledge, skills and behaviours required to pass the End Point Assessment (EPA).

- 11. Please can you start by telling me about how you are progressing with your apprenticeship?
- 12. Reflecting over your apprenticeship experience, could you start by describing any differences of your view of apprenticeships between the time you started and now?
- 13. Please could you describe how being an apprentice impacted on you within your occupation?
  - a. Describe what it was like being an apprentice in the workplace?
- 14. How did being an apprentice influence the way you see yourself at work?
- 15. How did you learn during your apprenticeship?
- 16. What elements of learning worked well and which didn't?
- 17. Please describe the process of learning on and off the job?
  - a. What did this involve?
  - b. Could you explain how you used reflection when developing new knowledge/skill? (Researcher to explain experiential learning)
- 18. What communities of practice supported you during your apprenticeship?
  - a. How did being part of this kind of social learning influence your learning?
- 19. To date, please describe how the apprenticeship has supported your personal development and career prospects?
- 20. Other comments

**Completion**

The apprentices should have now passed the EPA; therefore, they have met the knowledge, skills and behaviours as set out in the apprenticeship standards. The apprentice has now concluded the apprenticeship and is deemed as completed within their occupational pathway.

16. Reflecting over your apprenticeship experience, could you start by describing any differences of your view of apprenticeships between the time you started and now?
17. Overall, can you describe how being an apprentice made you feel?
  - a. Could you explain how this impacted your learning on the job?
  - b. Could you explain how view impacted your learning off the job?
18. Since completing your apprenticeship, can you describe what has changed within your job role?
19. Please explain what communities of practice are you still part of since completing your apprenticeship?
20. On reflection, please describe how the apprenticeship has supported your personal development and career prospects?
21. Overall, please can you describe whether you recommend an apprenticeship to upskill an existing employee?
22. Other comments

**Questions for you to consider:**

These are some of the questions that will be used as guide by the researcher when asking for your feedback, please do start to consider your responses.

- Focusing on the semi-structured interviews, firstly can you describe how the frequency provides (or otherwise) adequate opportunity to capture the apprentices' responses throughout the apprenticeship journey.
  - Can you explain whether the questions provide adequate coverage to enable the research aims to be answered?
  - Do you have other comments regarding the semi-structured interview method and proposed instrument?
- Thank you for taking part in this pilot study, do you have any other comments that you would like to conclude with?

**Notes:** You can use this space to add any responses you have from reviewing the semi-structured interviews:

**Diary Methods**

**Introduction**

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this pilot, only your opinions regarding the instruments will be used in the main study, any responses you provide when piloting the research instruments will not be used within the findings of this research project. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact [Brendan.coulson@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:Brendan.coulson@ntu.ac.uk) (Researcher).

The use of a reflective diary is a process in which the participants can actively and purposefully consider their feelings, reactions, thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, responses, and experiences.<sup>5</sup>

This diary method will use two protocols (see figure one); one will be a structured set of qualitative questions that will be sent to the participants at three stages of their apprenticeship journey, namely: on-programme, gateway and completion (see figure two). The other protocol is triggered by the participant at any point during the apprenticeship. The diary method has been developed online using Qualtrics which is a reputable online survey database used widely within research. The

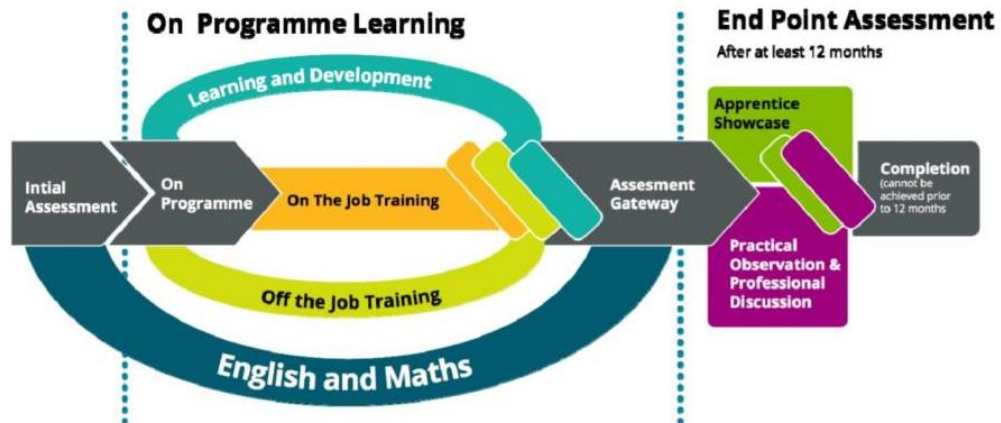
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<sup>5</sup> Dewey, J. 1993. *How We Think: A Restatement of the Relation of Reflective Thinking to the Educative Process*. Boston: D. C. Heath.

participants' responses will enable the researcher to identify trends and variations in their lived experiences throughout the apprenticeship journey. Please review the diary methods by selecting the links below, please also consider your feedback using the "[Questions for you to consider](#)" section of this document. Thank you.

Protocol:	Triggered
Event-contingent	Triggered by the participant at any point during the apprenticeship journey
Fixed signal-contingent	Triggered by the researcher at each key interval, namely: on-programme, gateway and completion

**Figure one:** Dairy Protocols



**Figure Two:** Apprenticeship Journey, Pearson (2017)<sup>6</sup>

**Links to Diary Entries:**

Instrument	Apprenticeship Journey	Questions
Diary: Event-contingent: Triggered by the participant at any point during the apprenticeship journey  <a href="#">Diary: Participant Triggered</a>	Triggered by the participant at any point during the apprenticeship journey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Please provide the date this occurred, and describe the event that you would like to record</li> <li>• Could you describe how this event impacted your job role and apprenticeship training?</li> <li>• How did this event influence the way you see yourself in your professional spaces at work?</li> <li>• Other comments</li> </ul>
Diary: Fixed signal-contingent: Triggered by the researcher at key interval one  <a href="#">Diary: On-Programme</a>	Key Interval One (On-programme)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Please can you explain what is your general perception of apprenticeships?</li> <li>• From your response to question 1, can you describe what experience and/or information has influenced this perception?</li> <li>• Again, from your response in question 1, can you explain how your perception of apprenticeships could impact on your behaviour within your organisation? (e.g. your</li> </ul>

<sup>6</sup> Pearson. 2017. Customer Service Practitioner, Apprenticeship Standard. Pearson [online]. Available at: <https://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/new-apprenticeships/insight-documents/Gated%20content%20only/Customer%20Service%20webinar.pdf> [Accessed 15 April 2021].

		<p>wiliness to take on responsibilities, speak out etc.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Please explain how your perception of apprenticeships could influence the way you see yourself in your professional spaces at work.</li> <li>• Could you describe your apprenticeship and what you hope to achieve from the training?</li> <li>• Other comments</li> </ul>
<p>Diary: Fixed signal-contingent: Triggered by the researcher at key interval two</p> <p><a href="#">Diary: Assessment Gateway</a></p>	<p>Key Interval Two (Assessment Gateway)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having almost completed your apprenticeship, please describe whether your perception of apprenticeship generally has changed?</li> <li>• From your response to question 1, what key experiences has influenced your view?</li> <li>• Could you explain how your perception of apprenticeships impacted on your behaviour within your organisation? (e.g. your wiliness to take on responsibilities, speak out etc.)</li> <li>• Please explain how your perception of apprenticeships influenced the way you viewed yourself at work (Identity)</li> <li>• Other comments</li> </ul>
<p>Diary: Fixed signal-contingent: Triggered by the researcher at key interval three</p> <p><a href="#">Diary: Completion</a></p>	<p>Key Interval Three (Completion)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having completed your apprenticeship, describe your perception of an apprenticeship generally compared to you when you first started the apprenticeship?</li> <li>• From your response to question 1, what are the key experience that has influenced your view?</li> <li>• On reflection, did being an apprentice impact your behaviour within your organisation? (e.g. your wiliness to take on responsibilities, speak out etc.)</li> <li>• On reflection, how did being an apprentice influence the way you see yourself at work?</li> <li>• Other comments</li> </ul>

**Questions for you to consider:**

These are some of the questions that will be used as guide by the researcher when asking for your feedback, please do start to consider your responses.

- Focusing on the diary method, firstly can you explain whether the frequency and trigger points provides (or otherwise) adequate opportunity to capture the apprentices' responses throughout the apprenticeship journey.
  - Can you explain whether the questions provide adequate coverage to enable the research aims to be answered?
  - Do you have other comments regarding the diary method and proposed instrument?

- Thank you for taking part in this pilot study, do you have any other comments that you would like to conclude with?

**Notes:** You can use this space to add any responses you have from reviewing the diary methods:

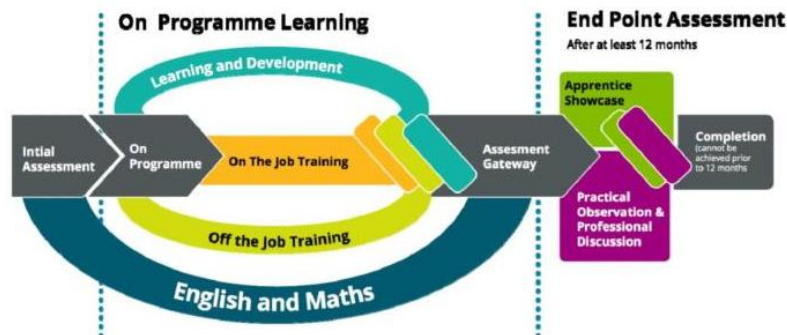
### Focus Groups

#### Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this pilot, only your opinions regarding the instruments will be used in the main study, any responses you provide when piloting the research instruments will not be used within the findings of this research project. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact [Brendan.coulson@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:Brendan.coulson@ntu.ac.uk) (Researcher).

A focus group is inherently social in form<sup>7</sup>, the data generated from a focus group emerges naturally through a group conversation. Focus groups have a facilitator that provides prompts to engage the conversation. Focus groups generate responses at three levels of analysis, these include: the individual, group, and interactive level.

Focus groups will be used at two intervals during the apprentices' learning journey, these include pre-programme and completion (see figure one). The intention is to capture the communication between a group of participants' in order to explore their collective responses overtime. This will enable the researcher to identify trends and variations compared to their pre-programme and completion discussions. Please review the proposed focus group schedules and consider the questions that are outlined in the "Questions for you to consider" section of this document. Thank you.



**Figure One:** Apprenticeship Journey, Pearson (2017)<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Cyr, J. 2019. Focus Groups for the Social Science Researcher: Methods for Social Inquiry. Cambridge University Press.

<sup>8</sup> Pearson. 2017. Customer Service Practitioner, Apprenticeship Standard. Pearson [online]. Available at: <https://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/new-apprenticeships/insight-documents/Gated%20content%20only/Customer%20Service%20webinar.pdf> [Accessed 15 April 2021]

**Focus Group Schedule: Pre-programme**

At this stage apprentices have enrolled to an apprenticeship programme but have not yet started their apprenticeship journey. This is an opportunity to identify their preconceptions and awareness of apprenticeships.

**Overview:**

Teams

**Platform:** Microsoft

This focus group will concentrate on your initial perceptions regarding apprenticeships, in-particular how these perceptions were formed and how these could impact on your social identity, behaviour and learning within your occupation.

**Ground rules:**

- To maintain anonymity, each participant will be required to keep their cameras off and take on a pseudonym.
- No direct reference to a training provider or employer
- Please allow others to provide their perspective without interruption
- The facilitator will chair the focus group to enable all participants' views to be heard
- Please use respectful language when participating in the focus group discussion
- Participants have already completed a consent form; further confirmation will be sought to confirm that all participants agree with the session being recorded
- Refer the candidates to the participant information and consent form for further clarification on their rights and the research process

**Facilitation Steps:**

- Ensure that all cameras are off and the ground rules are explained
- Inform the participants of the focus group overview
- Once the ground rules are satisfied, start the recording
- Open discussion by asking what is your view about apprenticeships?
  - What has influenced this view?
  - How do you think others perceive an apprenticeship?
- I would like to find out more about why you have decided to do an apprenticeship.
  - How do you think you will learn?
  - What do you hope to achieve from doing an apprenticeship?
- Ok, considering your view and the general perceptions of apprenticeships:
  - How do you think being an apprentice will impact on how others view you?
  - Do you think being an apprentice will change the way you are during work?
  - Do you think that being an apprentice will change the way you are treated at work?
- Now that we have discussed apprenticeships, has your perception changed?
- Thank you for taking part. I hope you found the discussions useful. I would just like to ask if there is anything that anyone wishes to add before we close our discussions?

**Standard prompts:**

- Can you tell me more about that please?
- Is this how other people feel?
- Do others share this view?
- Can you talk about why you think that?
- Can you talk about what that means for you?

**Focus Group Schedule: Completion**

The apprentices should have now passed the EPA; therefore, they have met the knowledge, skills and behaviours as set out in the apprenticeship standards. The apprentice has now concluded the apprenticeship and is deemed as competed within their occupational pathway.

**Overview:**

Teams

**Platform:** Microsoft

This focus group will reflect on whether you have changed your view regarding apprenticeships from your initial pre-programme perceptions, and to discuss your lived experiences during your apprenticeship, in-particular how being an apprentice impacted on your social identity, behaviour and your occupational standing.

**Ground rules:**

- To maintain anonymity, each participant will be required to keep their cameras off and will take on a pseudonym.
- No direct reference to a training provider or employer
- Please allow others to provide their prospective without interruption
- The facilitator will chair the focus group to enable all participants' views to be heard
- Please use respectful language when participating in the focus group discussion
- Participants have already completed a consent form; further confirmation will be sought to confirm that all participants agree with the session being recorded
- Refer the candidates to the participant information and consent form for further clarification on their rights and the research process

**Facilitation Steps:**

- Ensure that all cameras are off and the ground rules are explained
- Inform the participants of the focus group overview
- Once the ground rules are satisfied, start the recording
- Open discussion by asking has your view of an apprenticeship changed as a result of completing one?
  - What has influenced this view?
  - Do you think the general views of your colleagues have changed since you have completed an apprenticeship?
- On reflection, did an apprenticeship meet your initial expectations?
  - How did you learn, did this meet your initial expectations?
  - What in-work/apprenticeship social groups were you part of during your apprenticeship?
  - Did these groups support your learning?
  - Did you get excluded from any groupings as a result of being an apprentice?
  - What did you achieve from doing an apprenticeship?
- On reflection, considering your view and the general perceptions of apprenticeships:
  - Did being an apprentice impact on how others viewed you?
  - Did being an apprentice change the way you were during work?
  - Did you get treated differently as a result of being an apprentice?
  - Did the apprenticeship improve your career prospects?



- Now that you have completed an apprenticeship, has your perception changed, would you recommend an apprenticeship to upskill an existing employee?
- Thank you for taking part. I hope you found the discussions useful. I would just like to ask if there is anything that anyone wishes to add before we close our discussions?

**Standard prompts:**

- Can you tell me more about that please?
- Is this how other people feel?
- Do others share this view?
- Can you talk about why you think that?
- Can you talk about what that means for you?

**Questions for you to consider:**

These are some of the questions that will be used as guide by the researcher when asking for your feedback, please do start to consider your responses.

- Concentrating on the focus groups, firstly can you describe how the frequency provides (or otherwise) adequate opportunity to capture the apprentices' responses throughout the apprenticeship journey.
  - Can you explain whether the prompts provide adequate coverage to enable the research aims to be answered?
  - Do you have other comments regarding the focus group method and proposed instrument?
- Thank you for taking part in this pilot study, do you have any other comments that you would like to conclude with?

**Notes:** You can use this space to add any responses you have from reviewing the focus group schedules:

# Appendix Six: Pilot Study Findings

## **Pilot Study Findings**

### Stage 1: The researcher's initial encounter with the text

From the initial reading of each of the transcriptions, it became clear that some of the initial questions asked by the researcher did not elicit an open-endedness and conversation (Willig, 2009), for example,

*"Do you think it captures the apprenticeship journey throughout?" (P1, Line 28), "Do you think it is enough coverage?" (P1, Line 29).*

This approach to questioning within a semi-structured interview did not encourage a generative narrative; a way into the phenomenon of study as determined by the participant (Galletta and Cross, 2013).

The researcher's questioning became more preceptive throughout the process of conducting the semi-structured interviews, and the questions provided more opportunities for the participants' point of view to present a stronger, more in-depth meaning (Legard, Keegan and Ward, 2003), for example,

*"Please describe whether this method is appropriate for this study?", (P2, Line 15)*

*"Please explain why you think this is necessary?", (P2, Line 19).*

The participants' understanding of terminology was also noteworthy, namely, terms such as 'communities of practice' and 'social learning'. All participants remarked that these terms will be difficult for the participants of the main study to engage with, for example,

*"The only thing I might clarify if I was asked these questions is what communities of practice means. It's not a term that I'm too familiar with", (P5, Line 22).*

Most participants identified concerns with the diary method, with particular concern with the event contingent approach, whereby, a participant could input a diary entry at any time during the apprenticeship journey to record a critical experience, (Bolger et al., 2003). One participant stated,

*"Yeah, I don't really think the diary method will get completed in this study", (P3, Line 46).*

Once prompted by the researcher to explain this, participant P3 elaborated with,

*"The fixed points might get completed, 'cause you are prompting them to do them, but the one that they complete as and when it suits them [event contingent], I don't think will work, I wouldn't do it", (P3, Line 48).*

Another participant shared a similar view,

*"The fixed events are fine, however the diary triggered event is a problem", (P2, Line 74).*

The fixed contingent approach referred to by the participants is a diary entry that the respondents are prompted to complete to report on their experience at that point in time (Bolger et al., 2003). The previous participants' remarks suggest that the fixed contingent approach, if administered correctly, should be the only approach used in the diary method.

Finally, from the initial reading of the transcripts, a common remark was regarding the sample size of the main study, for example,

*"I think four to five would potentially be a maximum", (P1, Line 110).*

Participant P1, followed this comment with,

*"Think any more than that you're going to start losing people and people are not going to participate", (P1, Line 111).*

Participant P2 supports this by stating,

*"Aren't you looking for in depth intelligence and quality of conversation", (P2, Line 84)*

*"It's more interesting to really understand four- or five-people's experiences", (P2, Line 86)*

*"There's a risk of not having an in-depth knowledge of 15 to 18", (P2, Line 88).*

Most participants in the pilot study commented that the sample size should be modest. Creswell (2007, pg.217) states that,

*"it is typical in qualitative research to study a few individuals or few cases".*

Creswell (2007) further suggests that with the addition of every participant the researcher's ability to conduct in-depth research diminishes and risks the project being overwhelming.

### Stage 2: Identification of themes

Following the researcher's initial encounter with the transcripts, the researcher systematically re-examined the text, line by line, from each transcript, and captured what is represented in the text through the identification of the following thematic labels (Willig, 2009).

Participant P1:

1. Semi-structured interviews: Consideration of Participant Selection (line 48)
2. Semi-structured interviews: Amendment Needed, Terminology, Level 3 and Below Participants (Community of Practice, Social Learning), (line 55, 56, 57, 62)
3. Semi-structured interviews: Agreed Terminology for Level 5+ Participants (line 51)
4. Semi-structured interviews: Agreed Questions Meet Research Objectives (line 30, 38)
5. Semi-structured interviews: Agreed Question Flow (line 42)
6. Semi-structured interviews: Agreed Frequency (line 30)
7. Recommendation: Participants, Reduce Sample Size (105, 106, 110, 111, 150, 154)
8. Recommendation: Participants, Range of Levels, Sectors and Providers (line 100)
9. Focus Groups: Consideration of Participant Selection (line 89, 90, 94, 95)
10. Focus Groups: Amendment, Prompt was a Closed Question (line 80, 81)
11. Focus Groups: Agreed Suitable Method for Study (line 75, 103)
12. Focus Groups: Agreed Frequency (line 93)
13. Diary Method: Concern with Event Contingent (line 126, 129, 131)
14. Diary Method: Amendment Needed, Min. Word Count (line 138)
15. Diary Method: Amendment Needed, Keep Design Simple (line 135, 137)
16. Diary Method: Agreed Approach, Fixed Contingent (line 133)

Participant P2:

1. Semi-structured interviews: Questions Do Not Map to Research Objectives (line 32, 35)
2. Semi-structured interviews: Frequency, Fourth Interview Required (line 18, 24)
3. Semi-structured interviews: Amendment Needed, Terminology (Community of Practice, Social Learning), (line 48, 50)
4. Semi-structured interviews: Amendment Needed, Terminology (Behaviour), (line 38, 42, 46)

5. Semi-structured interviews: Agreed Suitable Method for Study (line 16, 28)
6. Semi-structured interviews: Additional Question Suggested (Already Employed), (line 53)
7. Recommendation: Participants, Reduce Sample Size (line 82, 84, 86)
8. Recommendation: Methods, Used at Different Points in the Apprenticeship Journey (line 36, 79)
9. Focus Groups: Amendment, More Activity Driven (line 60, 61)
10. Focus Groups: Agreed Suitable Method for Study (line 57, 63)
11. Diary Method: Concern with Event Contingent (line 74, 76)
12. Diary Method: Agreed Approach, Fixed Contingent (line 74, 77)

Participant P3:

1. Semi-structured interviews: Amendment Needed, Terminology, Level 3 and Below Participants (Community of Practice, Social Learning), (line 26)
2. Semi-structured interviews: Agreed Suitable Method for Study (line, 15, 16)
3. Semi-structured interviews: Agreed Questions Meet Research Objectives (line 20, 28)
4. Semi-structured interviews: Agreed Frequency (line 18)
5. Recommendation: Participants, Reduce Sample Size (line 66, 67)
6. Recommendation: Consideration for Apprentices' Workload (line 30)
7. Focus Groups: Amendment, More Activity Driven (line 41)
8. Diary Method: Consideration of Using a Questionnaire Instead (line 55, 57)
9. Diary Method: Concern with Event Contingent (line 48, 49)
10. Diary Method: Agreed Questions Meet Research Objectives (line 62)
11. Diary Method: Agreed Approach, Fixed Contingent (line 48, 51, 52, 53)

Participant P4:

1. Semi-structured interviews: Questions Map to Research Objectives (line 28)
2. Semi-structured interviews: Amendment Needed, Terminology (Community of Practice, Social Learning), (line 22, 24)
3. Semi-structured interviews: Amendment Needed, Terminology (Behaviour), (line 17, 20)
4. Semi-structured interviews: Agreed Frequency (line 26)
5. Recommendation: Methods, Used at Different Points in the Apprenticeship Journey (line 41)
6. Recommendation: Consideration for Apprentices' Workload (line 30, 32, 34, 50, 53)
7. Focus Group: Additional Question (Funding Related), (line 42, 44)
8. Diary Method: Consideration of Using a Questionnaire Instead (line 55, 57)

Participant P5:

1. Semi-structured interviews: Amendment Needed, Terminology (Community of Practice), (line 22)
2. Semi-structured interviews: Agreed Suitable Method for Study, (line 26, 28)
3. Semi-structured interviews: Agreed Questions Meet Research Objectives (line 21)
4. Semi-structured interviews: Agreed Frequency (line 17, 18)
5. Recommendation: Participants, Reduce Sample Size (line 54, 56)
6. Focus Groups: Amendment, More Activity Driven (line 37, 39)
7. Focus Group: Agreed Suitable Method for Study (line 42, 59)
8. Focus Group: Agreed Ground Rules (line 32,33)
9. Diary Method: Alternative Method, Survey or Similar (line 51)
10. Diary Method: Agreed Questions Meet Research Objectives (line 50)

#### 11. Diary Method: Agreed Approach, Fixed Contingent (line 48)

##### Stage 3: Clustering of themes

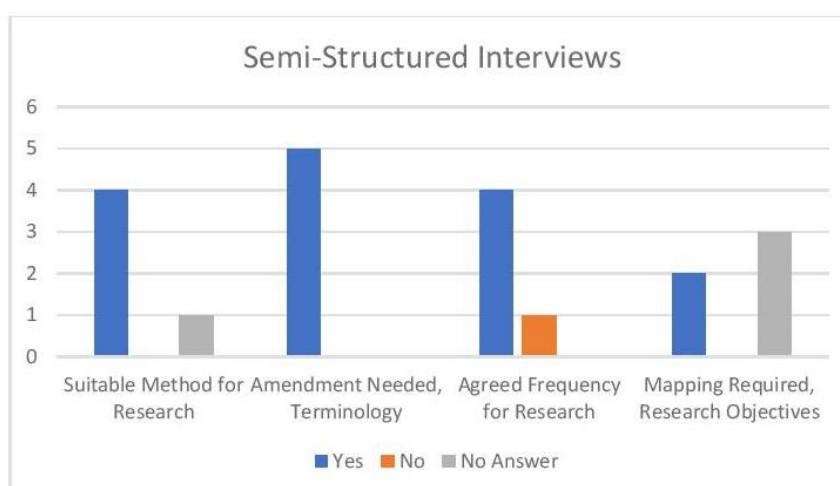
The themes identified in stage 2 of the analysis share parallels, the researcher arranged the themes into clusters based on similar reference points.

- Cluster 1: Semi-structured interviews suitability
  - Suitable Method for Research (P1.4, P2.5, P3.3, P5.2, P5.3)
  - Amendment Needed, Terminology (P1.2, P2.3, P2.4, P3.1, P4.2, P4.3, P5.1)
  - Agreed Frequency for Research (P1.5, P1.6, P2.1, P2.2, P3.4, P4.4, P5.4)
  - Mapping Required, Research Objectives (P2.1, P4.1)
  
- Cluster 2: Focus Groups Suitability
  - Agreed Suitable Method for Study (P1.11, P2.10, P5.7)
  - Amendment, More Activity Driven (P2.10, P3.7, P5.6)
  
- Cluster 3: Diary Method Suitability
  - Agreed Suitable Method for Study (P3.8, P4.7, P5.9)
  - Concern with Event Contingent (P1.13, P2.11, P3.9)
  - Agreed Approach, Fixed Contingent (P1.16, P2.12, P3.11, P5.11)
  - Agreed Questions Meet Research (P3.10, P5.10)
  
- Cluster 4: Trending Recommendations
  - Reduce Sample Size (P1.7, P2.7, P3.5, P5.5)
  - Methods, Used at Different Points in the Apprenticeship Journey (P2.8, P4.5)
  - Consideration for Apprentices' Workload (P3.6, P4.5)
  
- Cluster 5: Non-Relatable Themes (only one occurrence)
  - P2: Semi-structured interviews Additional Question Suggested
  - P1: Semi-structured interviews: Consideration of Participant Selection
  - P1: Semi-structured interviews: Agreed Terminology for Level 5+ Participants
  - P1: Semi-structured interviews: Agreed Question Flow
  - P5: Focus Group: Agreed Ground Rules
  - P4: Focus Group: Additional Question (Funding Related)
  - P1: Focus Groups: Agreed Frequency
  - P1: Diary Method: Amendment Needed, Min. Word Count
  - P1: Diary Method: Amendment Needed, Keep Design Simple
  - P1: Recommendation: Participants, Range of Levels, Sectors and Providers

##### Stage 4: Production of summary charts

The findings of 'Cluster 5: Non-Relatable Themes (only one occurrence)' was consolidated within the preceding clusters. Therefore, the researcher has provided a discussion for clusters 1-4.

Cluster 1: Semi-structured interviews suitability



**CHART 1: PILOT - SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS - THEMATICAL ANALYSIS**

The majority of the participants 80% agreed that semi-structured interviews are a suitable method for the proposed study.

All participants agreed that the terminology of some questions need further consideration, including community of practice, social learning, and behaviour.

Most participants agreed (80%) the proposed frequency throughout the apprenticeship journey is correct. 20% disagreed, with one participant stating that,

*"I would suggest a semi-structured interview at the start of [the] gateway and at the end of [the] gateway", (P2, Line 24).*

The participant clarified the reason for this with,

*"As an apprentice, you are transitioning from an individual perspective just before the assessment gateway", "the way I perceived myself varied during this period", (P2, Line 24).*

A few of participants (40%) suggested that the proposed questions should be re-mapped to the research objectives to ensure there is clear alignment.

Themes that only had one occurrence; only commented on by an individual participant, are also noteworthy and offer some valuable considerations, for semi-structured interviews these include:

- P2: Semi-structured Interviews: Additional Question Suggested

This participant suggested that a question should be asked at the first interview to clarify that participants were an existing employee before enrolling onto an apprenticeship programme.

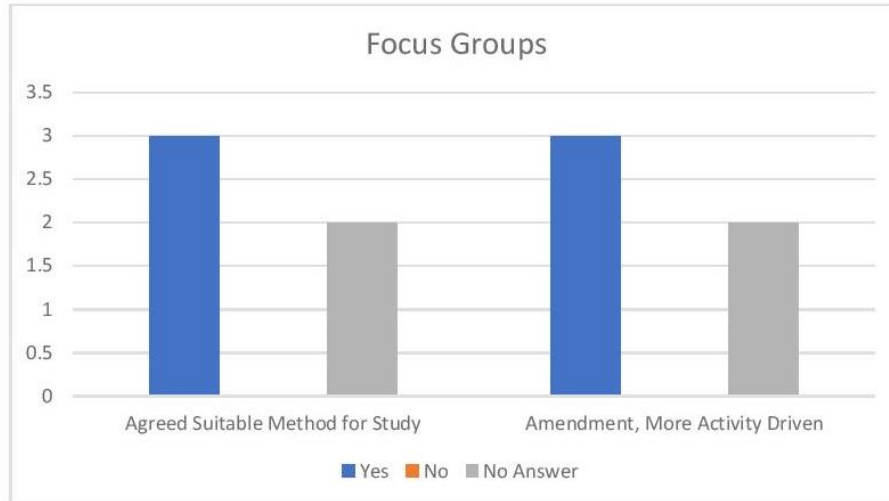
- P1: Semi-structured interviews: Consideration of Participant Selection
- P1: Recommendation: Participants, Range of Levels, Sectors and Providers

To provide a range of different perspectives, participant P1 repeatedly recommended that participants should be from a range of providers, including an independent training provider, FE college, and a university.

- P1: Semi-structured interviews: Agreed Terminology for Level 5+ Participants

Participant P1 agreed that the terminology was suitable for a study with participants at level 5 and above, however this participant also recommended that the terms 'community of practice' and 'social learning' should be framed differently to make it accessible for participants from level 3 or below.

Cluster 2: Focus Groups Suitability



**CHART 2: PILOT - FOCUS GROUPS - THEMATIC ANALYSIS**

Some of participants agreed (60%) that focus groups were a suitable method to meet the research objectives. The same number of participants also agreed that the focus groups should include more activity-based tasks (e.g., pairing activity) to encourage engagement and group discussion.

Individual participants made the following suggestions:

- P5: Focus Group: Agreed Ground Rules

One participant agreed that the ground rules for the focus group were suitable to ensure that all the participants were provided with a safe space to have an open discussion regarding their apprenticeship experience.

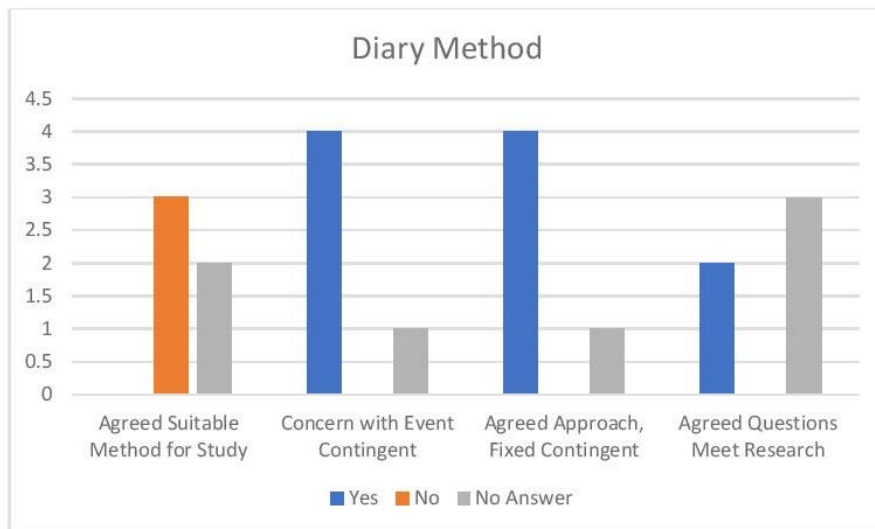
- P4: Focus Group: Additional Question (Funding Related)

Participant P4 suggested asking a question during the focus groups to provoke a discussion regarding how the participants apprenticeship training was funded, and whether this had an impact on the participants' respective perception of being an apprentice.

- P1: Focus Groups: Agreed Frequency

Participant P1 agreed that the frequency of the focus groups is suitably aligned to the apprenticeship journey.

Cluster 3: Diary Method Suitability



**CHART 3:** PILOT - DIARY METHOD - THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Some of participants disagreed (60%) that the diary method was an appropriate method for this study. One participant commented with,

*"When you're quite time poor, a survey or those fixed points are fine, I wouldn't have time to complete a diary as an apprentice, generally", (P4, Line 50).*

The majority of participants (80%) made comments about a concern with the event contingent approach. These participants suggested that apprentices would not engage with this method. Conversely, the same number of participants thought that the fixed contingent approach was a suitable method to use because it prompts the participants to complete a reflection at a particular point in time.

Whereas a few of participants (40%) agreed that the questions used in the diary method were appropriate to meet the objectives of the main study.

Participant P1 made the following additional suggestions:

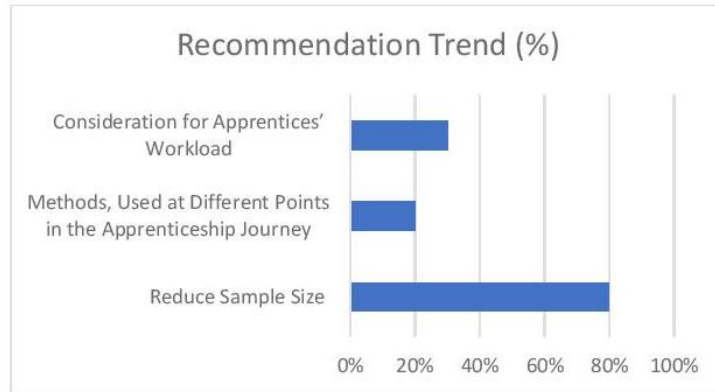
- P1: Diary Method: Amendment Needed, Min. Word Count
- P1: Diary Method: Amendment Needed, Keep Design Simple

P1 suggested the above, to prevent confusion, and to ensure that the participants provide enough qualitative detail by applying a minimum word count to each question in the diary method.

Cluster 4: Trending Recommendations

Most participants provided several general considerations that apply across all methods.





**CHART 4:** PILOT - RECOMMENDATION TREND - THEMATICAL ANALYSIS

A few of participants (30%) remarked that apprentices will find it difficult to engage with the research project if it becomes overburdensome. One participant commented with,

*"remember that these participants will be busy, working and studying", (P4, Line 30),*

*"This could cause them to squash their involvement in this study into a long time at [the] weekends and evenings, and stuff is bound to affect their work [-] life balance", (P4, Line 32).*

A minority of participants (20%) commented that the methods should be used at different points throughout the apprenticeship journey to capture all opportunities that could impact on the participant individually and professionally. Participant P2 commented with,

*"Like with all the methods, do it at different points to the other two methods to capture more of the journey", (P4, Line 79).*

Most of the participants suggested a smaller sample for the main study for the following reasons, *"Aren't you looking for in depth intelligence and quality of conversation", (P4, Line 84)*

*"[The study will] start losing people and people are not going to participate", (P1, Line 111).*