

# Becoming a Veteran in further education: a vocation or vocational?

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the work-life experiences of further education practitioners who have served 20 years or more within the sector. A qualitative, narrative approach is used to look in depth at six Veteran practitioners. The thesis explores the factors that have allowed the participants to maintain their careers for such a long period and seeks to understand the enabling and disabling factors.

The data revealed a picture of further education as a diverse but precarious employment environment where practitioners are subject to the 'churn' of constantly changing governmental policy and uncertain funding. The narratives give primary evidence of the impact of policy and funding decisions on individuals and the difficult decisions they have made about their work and lives. There were marked differences of workplace experiences between the male and female participants.

The research draws on Bourdieu's interwoven theories of field, habitus and capital to theorise the differences in the Veterans' experiences, building a picture of an interaction between the 'Skills discourse' of further education, neoliberal marketisation of education and patriarchal assumptions of skill.

The evidence presented, from the six Veterans, showed that despite the dominance of the 'Skills discourse' in government further education policy, the Veteran participants' longevity was fuelled by matters that transcended policy rhetoric and instead relied on deeply held values.

For this small group of three men and three women, working in further education was a vocation that they had found, often accidentally, that met a personal need born of their own educational experiences and backgrounds. They identify closely with the 'othering' that society has dealt their learners and their service in further education is fuelled by a desire to offer learners a better deal.

The study concludes that the public rhetoric around skills training masks what is rewarding about teaching in further education and what motivates people to keep working. The research found that the participants rejected a reductionist view of their role, posited by the 'Skills discourse', as that of a vocational trainer in favour of a pedagogically informed, learner-centred view.

## List of Abbreviations

ACE = Adult and Community Education

AoC = Association of Colleges

CAVTL = Commission on Adult Teaching and Learning

ETF = Education and Training Foundation

ESOL = English for Speakers of Other Languages

FE = Further Education

FES = Further education and skills

GCSE = General Certificate of Secondary Education

GFE = General Further Education College

HE = Higher Education

HND = Higher National Diploma

IfATE = Institute for Apprenticeship and Technical Education

ITP = Independent Training Provider

LA = Local Authority

MA = Master of Arts

MSc = Master of Science

NATSPEC = Organisation representing special needs education providers

OfSTED = Office for Standards in Education

ONS = Office for National Statistics

PGCE = Postgraduate Certificate in Education

QTS = Qualified Teacher Status

QTLS = Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills

SEND = Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

SET = Society for Education and Training

SfL = Skills for Life

VET = Vocational Education and Training

WBL = Work-based Learning

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the research

### 1.1 Research context and scope

This piece of research is set within the English further education system. The term further education includes many types of learning provision. The diagram below gives an overview.

Fig. 1 The further education sector (Education and Training Foundation 2020a p.5, Augur 2019 p.24)



The diverse types of provision can make further education difficult to apprehend in the public imagination. Further education may take place in a farmyard, on a railway track, in a prison, a community centre or traditional classroom. Further education is a great deal more than is suggested by a narrow picture of general further education colleges. The whole of further education is considered within the scope of the study although it is acknowledged from the start that it would not be feasible for a study of this size to sample all sections of the sector. In this piece of research, I am seeking to acknowledge the work done by practitioners across further education, not just general further education colleges.

The further education professionals who work with young people and adults in varied and often surprising settings across the further education landscape will be the context for the research. The research is specifically focused on people who have been working in the sector for an extended period of time. Chapter 2, the Context chapter will explore details of the sector and factors influencing the intended research participants.

## 1.2 Research problem and significance

This piece of research spanned the time-period of the COVID-19 pandemic. The planning stages took part prior to the pandemic, the data collection occurred during restrictions and the analysis occurred post pandemic. The time-period is significant because the investigation of older further education practitioners appeared to be an interesting and under-researched area before the pandemic but post-pandemic the importance of understanding this group of workers has increased.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the contribution of older workers to the national economy and well-being of the country was recognised. A government Office for Science report in 2016 predicted that by 2050, 34% of the working age population would be aged between 50 and the state pension age (Office for Science 2016 p.8). They conclude that:

The productivity and economic success of the UK will therefore be increasingly tied to the productivity and success of its ageing workforce. Encouraging older people to remain in work will help society to support growing numbers of dependents, while providing individuals with the financial and mental resources needed for longer periods of retirement (Office for Science 2016 p.8).

They posit that staying in work is not simply a matter of economics but also of personal well-being. However, since the start of the pandemic, 3.5 million people aged between 50 and 64 have shown that they disagree with the opinion that they would be happier and healthier at work (Boileau and Cribbs 2022). The figures for older workers dropping out of the workforce continue to increase. In March 2023, the House of Commons heard evidence that the 'inactivity rate' for the 50-64 age range had increased 1.7% between the start of the pandemic and January 2023 (House of Commons Library 2023) causing concern on economic grounds. An Office for National Statistics (ONS) report, 'Over 50s Lifestyle Study' looked into the underlying reasons for the change and found that the decision to leave the workforce was driven by personal aspects such as a quest for better mental health, changed life priorities exacerbated by the pandemic and not feeling valued at work (ONS 2022). The evidence shows that in addition to demographic changes towards an older population, older people are increasingly valuing lifestyles that value intrinsic rewards more highly than pay. The report concludes that there is a national need to understand how older people are motivated to stay in the workforce through intrinsic, life-enhancing rewards.

These national workforce changes are amplified in the further education sector where in March 2022, the Association of Colleges (AoC) declared, 'the worst staffing crisis in two decades' (AoC 2022) signalling that finding appropriate staff has become increasingly difficult. A 2025 report for the Department for Education revealed that teacher numbers in further education were not increasing in line with the learners and in 2022/23, 5.1% of teaching posts were vacant in general further education colleges, compared to a vacancy rate of 0.7% in secondary schools (DfE 2025a p.6).

Therefore, drawing all these contextual factors together, retaining older, experienced practitioners has become important in supporting staffing levels for learning providers.

### 1.3 Research aims

This study will seek to understand what continues to motivate older practitioners in the further education sector to remain in the workforce. It draws on the experiences of people who have been working in further education for 20 years or more to explore their experiences and what has kept them in their profession long enough to become 'Veteran' (I explore the term below). The evidence gathered may then suggest ways in which the sector can better retain a valuable section of the workforce.

I also want to explore personal aspects of becoming 'Veteran'. In the introduction to 'Identity and resistance in further education' Bennett and Smith (2018 p.2) describe teachers in the further education sector as having a 'dogged insistence on sticking to their values whilst adapting to changing circumstances'. I would like to find out whether this is true. If late career teachers are 'sticking' to their 'values', then I would like to understand what those values are and how this relates to becoming 'Veteran'.

### 1.4 My interest

My interest in Veteran practitioners is based both in the personal and the public realms. I have worked in further education for 28 years in various settings.

Reaching toward the end of my career in further education, I am interested to find out about people like me, on the basis of pure curiosity. I have often been bemused by the changing priorities of my employment environment and I would like to

understand if other people have had the same sort of experiences. I believe there is also an academic purpose in listening to people who have accumulated a wealth of professional capital. Listening to the voices of experience could be helpful in informing policy-making going forward. This study aims to listen to late career practitioners and try to draw out some learning from their experiences.

Unexpectedly, this study has been a deeply personal journey of uncovering the meaning, time and energy poured into a working-life. The aim was to examine the past careers of Veteran further education practitioners, to find out what had allowed them to persevere and become Veteran. I had not realised that in looking back I was really trying to look forward to retirement and ask whether the chunk of my life spent in further education had been worth it. In looking at the Veterans' working lives and their reflections, I was reflecting on my own. The six further education practitioners allowed me to see what was important to them and in the long run what faded into insignificance and in so doing make comparisons to my own values in a preparation for a thoughtful egress from the sector.

## 1.5 Key Nomenclature

In this thesis, the term 'further education' is used to encompass all of the types of provision mentioned in Figure 1 above. Nomenclature around further education is an area that is subject to change and will be explored in greater depth in Chapter 2 Context.

### 1.5.1 Veteran

The terms 'Veteran' and 'long-serving' are used to describe the research participants in an interchangeable way throughout this study. Chiong (2017) points out that the term 'Veteran' could carry connotations of mastery as well as length of

service. It is beyond the scope of this project to evaluate whether the participants have attained expertise, so for this project 'Veteran' should be read as synonymous with 'long-serving' and simply refers to people who have been practitioners in the further education sector for more than 20 years. The title Veteran may also carry connotations of being post-practice as in ex-soldiers but for this study, although recently retired participants were considered, all participants were still working in further education.

The group of participants are referred to as the 'Veterans' with a capital V to indicate that I am referring to this specific group rather than a wider category of long serving further education practitioners. The term veteran-ness is intended to capture the elusive essence of what that means. The research aims to flesh out the particularities and significance of this essence.

#### 1.5.2 Practitioner

The word 'practitioner' is used as a term intended to encompass the variety of job roles that the participants may have performed within further education settings. The intended participants for this study will have had long careers and although teaching may have been part of their story, there may be other aspects of their work in further education that will be drawn out during the research. The titles used for the jobs the participants do within further education are equally contentious. Therefore, the word 'practitioner' is used to encompass the many potential job titles that the participants may have.

#### 1.5.3 Career

The word 'career' is used to describe the time that the participants have spent working in further education. 'Career' can be a term loaded with implications of

rising through a hierarchy. For example, people can be dubbed a 'careerist' as a term of derision if they are seen to be overly concerned with self-promotion. In this thesis the term 'career' is not intended to carry those connotations. The journey of each participant through their working lives may take them in various directions and what they see as career progression may not match the stereotype of hierarchically layered role divisions. Therefore, the word 'career' will not be used with the assumption of any intent on behalf of the participants. The word should be read as 'the job or series of jobs that you do during your working life' (Cambridge Dictionary online 2023).

#### 1.5.4 Learner

The words 'learner' and 'student' are both used in this thesis to describe the people being taught in further education. Biesta (2010) argues that title 'learner' holds connotations of lacking something, he also has the same concerns about the word 'student', preferring 'speaker' as a title. Whilst his point about the creation of power imbalance is recognised, for clarity, I have used the terms that are most commonly found in the legislation and literature. In further education, the word 'learner' is often used to include people who would not attend a traditional college setting and would not see themselves as students. For example, for a prisoner learning to lay rail tracks or an apprentice air traffic controller in an airport being categorised as a 'student' would seem reductive of the complexity of their learning position.

#### 1.5.5 Discourse

The term 'discourse' is used throughout this thesis. The use of the term is intended to convey more than a simple written or spoken communication or debate. The usage here is based on a sociologically derived understanding of the way cultures

share concepts, establish norms and accept 'truths'. Fairclough's (1992) emphasis on the social context of discourse that places discourse as an interconnected, historically situated form of social practice is accepted.

Gee (1990) uses the idea of ordinary communication or discourse being thought of with a small 'd' but when social practices are added to communication, they become big 'D' discourses. Although I have not adopted the capitalisation, discourse should be read in this thesis with an imaginary large D. Later in the thesis, I start to use the term 'dominant discourse' in a way that implies a power relationship between those that benefit from the normalisation of a concept and those who are disadvantaged by it.

#### 1.5.6 Skills discourse

The word 'skills' is paired with further education throughout governmentally generated pronouncements and policies (e.g. Further Education and Skills Parliamentary Enquiry 2025). 'Skills' is such a pervasive term that it has become almost synonymous with further education (the problem of further education titles is discussed in 2.1). However, in this thesis, the term Skills discourse is intended include how discourse, as described above, directs and shapes understandings and 'truths' (Gee 1990).

I have capitalised the word Skills when I am using it to indicate the dominant discourse that positions further education as an economic conduit for producing vocational workers (Avis 2018). The Skills discourse is a term used throughout this thesis to indicate a narrow economic view of further education. It is not intended to be pejorative but is intended to indicate that the discourse is reductive and does not encompass the breadth of work that takes place in further education.

### 1.5.7 Precarity

The term 'precarity' is used to describe the working conditions that the participants in this study sometimes experienced during their time working in further education. My use of the term is not intended to align entirely with Butler's (2004, 2010) conception of the vulnerability of marginalised people to violence. I do not seek to portray my participants as marginalised from society in a general way but perhaps marginalised in terms of the education sector.

N.B. A discussion of the parameters of the term 'further education' follows in 2.1.

There is also a further section on key terms in literature included in 3.2.

### 1.6 Undertaking the study

The initial reading for this project suggested a variety of public and personal aspects that may have influenced the participants' experiences and their journey to Veteran status. The selection of sources funnelled down from internationally renowned overarching theories about education and society to writers closer to the further education sector. Both were informative and often led the reading off in new directions.

The challenge of choosing an appropriate methodology for the research centred around how best to capture the voices of long-serving further education professionals. Reading brought me towards a hybrid narrative approach which uses career mapping, free-flowing work-life storytelling followed by interview questions.

The interactions with the participants were inspiring, providing ample data to examine the research questions. Repeated re-examination of the data helped me

to build a picture of what had helped and hindered their working lives towards becoming Veteran.

## 1.7 Structure of the thesis

This piece of work has been divided into six chapters, intended to lead the reader through the planning, implementation and discoveries made in the research.

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2: The Research Context, gives an overview of further education as a sector. The chapter is intended to act firstly as a guide to the confusing landscape of further education. Chapter 2 will examine key factors that may influence the working lives of the participants such as training, pay, contracts and government policies.

Chapter 3: The Literature Review opens with an examination of a range of problematic language to try to reach an understanding of the nuanced nature of the language applied to further education. The chapter is constructed to give an analysis of the position of further education in UK society as a working environment and thence the potential subject positions of the individual Veterans. The personal aspects explored in the chapter start to link ideas of professionalism and professional identity with motivation for continuing in further education.

Chapter 4: Methodology will discuss the underpinning reasoning for the decisions around the design of the approach. The sub-sections of the chapter explore the underpinning philosophy of knowledge creation and the reasoning for selecting qualitative approaches. There are sections which explore design prior to implementation, reflexivity in implementation and post-implementation reflection.

Chapter 5 examines the data collected from the participants. The chapter is split into sections that introduce each person and give an initial insight into the three

sets of data that were collected from the participant. This section is intended to provide the reader with context for the data presented later in the chapter. The principle that informed this decision was that it is necessary to know something about the person to understand the significance of certain aspects of their experience.

Chapter 6 offers discussion and analysis focused on the themes that emerged from the data. These are presented in a chronological arc which reflects the way the participants told their stories.

Chapter 7 draws conclusions with regards to elements found in the data that have either enabled or created barriers in the participants' career journey. In this chapter, I make claims for the original contribution of knowledge made by this thesis.

## **Chapter 2: The Research Context**

The focus of this research is on how and why a sample of further education practitioners have survived long enough in the sector to become 'Veteran'. The purpose of this chapter is to give an overview of the professional milieu for the research. This chapter will aim to examine first further education as a sector and secondly the social environment of being an older worker in further education. The current and historical policy context of the sector will be reviewed to produce a picture of where further education in England sits in the 2020s and how it got there. As this research is intended to explore the working lives of Veterans, this chapter will also establish a context for overarching issues of being an older or late career worker in England in the 2020s.

### **2.1 What is further education?**

The further education sector as a whole will be the context for this study but as alluded to in the Introduction, there is difficulty in defining exactly what further education (FE) is. This Department for Education (DfE) explanation offers a narrow description,

Further education (FE) includes any study after secondary education that's not part of higher education (that is, not taken as part of an undergraduate or graduate degree). (DfE 2023)

However, the government description is slightly misleading as it is referring to the types of courses rather than the scope of the sector. Government figures for the first half of 2022/23 note that 224,300 students studied for a higher education (HE) award in a further education setting (2023). It was hard to find statistics on pre-16 learners who attended further education colleges either full or part-time. The

Association of Colleges (AoC) give a figure of 8,000 learners for 2022 (AoC 2023) but this is based purely on colleges and does not include independent or alternative provision that caters for pre-16s alongside their post-16 learners. The 8,000 figure is probably a vast under-estimate. For the purposes of this study, higher education in a further education setting and pre-16 provision will be included as part of the scope as it is part of the variety of provision offered under the further education umbrella.

The Association for Colleges website states that as of September 2025 there were 256 colleges in the UK with 213 in England (AoC 2025). Colleges served 3,112,870 learners in the year 2023-24 (Education Statistics Service 2025) so are approximately 1/3 of the size of the schools sector but around 100,000 more than the university sector. However, colleges are only part of the further education landscape. As seen in Fig. 1, further education is a wide and varied sector which includes general FE Colleges, sixth form colleges, specialist FE such as organisations catering for learning difficulties and disabilities, specific subject clusters such as land-based or arts colleges, prisons, probation and community education providers, charity, union learning, faith-based provision, work-based learning such as apprenticeship providers, company based learning and alternative providers. Independent Training Providers (ITP) are the next largest providers after colleges with around 4,000 registered with the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA 2023) but that does not include those who do not receive government funding. Government statistics estimate that community based further education accounted for over 192,000 learners in 2022 (Education Statistics Service 2023).

Courses range from pre-entry level to level 7 and can last anything from a few hours to several years. Educational settings may be a traditional looking classroom but equally may be a railway siding, stable or a church hall. Learners range from 14 years to people in their 80s. It is evident that further education as an umbrella term for a sector will contain a multiplicity of workplace experiences. The wide breadth of the sector means it is 'poorly defined and understood. It has been characterised as the 'everything else' sector' (Panchamia 2014 p.2).

Even when reducing further education to just colleges, the sector is difficult to define. The Foster Review in 2005 noted that:

Over time the FE college sector has responded to the ebbs and flows of need, funding and policy, acquiring but not necessarily shedding responsibilities and developing a multi-purpose culture and image (Foster 2005 p.13)

The multi-purpose image of further education starts to establish the difficulties governments and others have when trying to grasp the complexity of further education and its aims. Keep (2018 p.17) further cites the lack of a coherently structured system that leaves further education providers 'to cater for transitory demands, often from students who other providers were not keen or ill-equipped to cater for'. Alison Birkenshaw, President of the Association of Colleges (2017-8), shows agreement but believes that problems can be caused by the oversimplified representation of the further education sector. Her view may be limited by the type of organisation who choose to be members of the Association and in her need to maintain positive working relations with the government, but she also shows an awareness of the variety of additional provision. She explains the difficulty: 'we continue to attempt to describe the FE sector with linearity, in order to fit a simple

government narrative' (Birkenshaw 2018 p.7). Whether the motivation in creating a simplified lexicon is administrative or political is unclear but there is agreement that both the idea of a 'sector' and how it is referred to is problematic.

This research will therefore acknowledge the non-linearity, range of provision and the variety of experiences of those working in non-school, non-university education.

The word 'sector' will be used in the sense that it describes an 'area or portion that is distinct from others' (Oxford 2020) but is not intended to convey homogeneity.

The problem of nomenclature continues around the terms used for further education, which, it is acknowledged, is an imposed label. It is worth noting that as Biesta (2010) has commented, all language around education and even the term 'education' itself is problematic. However, this section of educational provision appears to be subject to particular problems with titles. Within the literature used for this research the terms; 'post-compulsory education' (BCU 2020), 'lifelong learning' (UK Commission for Employment and Skills 2008), 'further education' (FE) (AoC 2020), 'learning and skills' (Institute for Apprenticeships 2020), or 'further education and skills' (FES) (Ofsted 2020) are used to discuss this loose conglomeration of non-school, non-university educational provision. The term 'vocational education and training' (VET) is also used in the UK and internationally (OECD 2023). Sometimes the word 'technical' is added (TVET) (British Council 2021). All these terms fail in some measure to acknowledge either a particular learner group or the range of provision encompassed. It must also be noted that the choice of titles and terms is not value free. For example, the term 'lifelong learning sector' was used widely by the New Labour government of the early 2000s when political emphasis was being placed on retraining adults. The term can be interpreted as a signal of the incumbent government's intention for the sector.

Similarly, the prominence of the word 'skills' in the current nomenclature such as the 2022 'Skills and Post-16 Education Act' and the addition of the word 'skills' to further education to form the currently preferred term of further education and skills (FES) (Office for Standards in Education 2023) can be seen as the signalling of political intentions and direction for intervention.

For this piece of research, the term 'further education' has been chosen as opposed to FE or FES. It is intended to include all education that takes place outside schools and universities. This definition of further education will not be limited by level and thus will include provision for profound learning disabilities below school levels, non-accredited learning and higher education which takes place within a further education context. In some sections specific types of provision have been focused on and the terms used by the original authors will be referred to.

## 2.2 Further education learners

Although staff rather than learners are the focus of this research, the learners that they work with will form an intrinsic part of the context of the study. The learners will have formed the focus for the working experiences of the participants.

Although students of all backgrounds can be found in further education settings, there is a statistical over-representation of young people from socially disadvantaged or underserved backgrounds. The Sutton Trust (Lisauskaite *et al* 2021) and the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Further Education and Lifelong Learning (2023 p.2) have given the statistic of 43% of further education learners fitting into the rather crude measurement of disadvantage as entitlement to free school meals. This figure is based purely on colleges and does not include learners

over 18 or independent training providers so is likely to be an underestimate.

Research for the London School of Economics gives a useful comparison between further education and other stages of education.

About half of 16 and 17-year-old students go on to FE and sixth- form colleges after completing Year 11, and the share of students from disadvantaged backgrounds is about twice that in other educational settings (McNally *et al* 2022 p.3).

It becomes apparent that economic disadvantage or groups of learners who have been underserved by society may be a prominent feature of the work of the participants in this study.

There is also a rising trend towards diversity amongst the learner population in further education. The percentage of people in further education from Asian, black, mixed and 'other' ethnic groups went up from 19.3% to 23.6% in 2021/22 to 2022/23 (Education Statistics Service 2023). 18% of learners registered as having a learning difference or disability in the year 22/23 compared to 11% the previous year (*ibid.*).

### 2.3 Policy churn in further education

The further education sector has been subject to a great deal of change since incorporation took it out of local authority control in 1993 (Further and Higher Education Act 1992). This constantly changing environment has been the working landscape that the further education practitioners have negotiated throughout their careers.

Panchamia's (2014 p.10) report for the Institute for Government summarised the changes from 1980 to 2014 concluding that the sector has 'been defined by more or less continuous change over the last three decades'. The report lists,

28 major pieces of legislation related to vocational, FE and skills training, six different ministerial departments with overall responsibility for education', 48 secretaries of state with relevant responsibilities and no organisation has survived longer than a decade (ibid. p.5).

The years that have followed since Panchamia's report have not seen any slow-down in the constant cycle of change. Norris and Adam (2017 p.9) looked again at further education policy changes and found, 'It is difficult to access information about the initiatives and policies that have been tried before'. This is an astonishing statement for such a prestigious piece of research which has access to state records. The report describes:

a 'collective amnesia', disrupting institutional and organisational memory at the political and official levels. This weakened memory makes further change more likely, and the organisational loss of memory is amplified by the fact that relatively few Whitehall officials have direct – or indirect – experience of the FE sector (Norris and Adam 2017 p.9).

Whitehall officials may be unlikely to have been further education students themselves (Kirkup 2021) but additionally, they may be different officials. Keep (2021) concurs that the inconsistency of civil servants exacerbates the lack of policy continuity in further education, pointing out that civil servants typically move on after 18 months to two years but 'In some areas, such as apprenticeship, the turnover in policy staff is extremely rapid' (Keep 2021 p.6).

The amnesia appears to increase with each cycle of changes. Further education has been passed between education (DfE) and business (BIS) departments. For example, between 2010 and 2016 responsibility was split between the two but then returned wholly to education as part of the 2016 Technical and Further Education Bill to give a more ‘comprehensive, end-to-end view of skills and education’ (Robertson 2016). However, in 2025, the government announced that it would once again be moving part of the responsibility for further education away from the Department for Education (DfE) to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) (Starmer 2025). The term ‘collective amnesia’ is a striking one which encapsulates a seeming underlying lack of logical, reasoned progression in the cycle of constant change and unwillingness to take notice of the past.

National membership organisations which could provide a cohesive government facing voice, show a fragmentation which is a characteristic of further education. The Association of Colleges secure funding through government agencies and subscription from members (AoC 2023) and lobby on behalf of colleges. They can provide useful information and perspective but they are limited to colleges. The National Association of Specialist Colleges (Natspec) provide a similar membership service for specialist colleges (Natspec 2023) and Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE 2023<sup>1</sup>) does a similar job for training providers. Each organisation lobbies separately for their membership and gives opinions on how legislation impacts their section of further education but they fail to give an overarching cohesive picture that would mitigate ‘the collective amnesia’ of Whitehall.

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<sup>1</sup> It was announced in the King’s speech July 2024 that IfATE will be subsumed into a new agency Skills England

In his observations of the further education system over many years Keep (2021) draws a conclusion that government garners its views from a small range of sources that ignores the voices of actual practitioners.

Within the centralised, top-down English system there is remarkably little capacity for bottom-up policy making, and there are few meaningful feedback loops that enable frontline staff to inform policy makers how their reforms are playing out on the ground. The result is that policy formation in England tends to occur within a fairly tightly sealed national 'bubble' where a limited number of players interact in the design of interventions (Keep, 2021 p.9).

There are practitioner facing organisations that successive governments have funded that try to draw together the many strands of further education (National Archives online 2024). However, they exist to produce cohesive expectations for practice and push forward government agendas not to lobby government on behalf of their membership. Even at the level of their own aims the recognition of these organisations suffer from successive reinventions. From 1999-2002 the Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO) set teaching standards for the sector. They were succeeded by the Institute for Learning (IfL) and Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) who in 2011 were subsumed into the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) and its sister organisation the Society for Education and Training (SET). The government-funded ETF and SET presently generate professional standards, training and until 2020 collected workforce statistics for the sector. However, SET gives the figure of 22,000 members (SET 2023) out of an estimated 81,400 further education teachers (Education Statistics Service 2023) which must limit their ability to speak for the workforce.

In the context of this study, the lived experiences and careers of the Veterans appear to present a cohesion that is lacking in the policy environment and the structures it generates. They have lived through the changes and are in an ideal position to comment on the impact on learners and learning of each change of direction. Norris and Adam (2017) suggest that reflecting on previous alterations to the sector would be an important contribution to the future:

Amid all this change, evaluation or evidence about which policies and reforms have worked, and which have not, is in short supply (Norris and Adam 2017 p.9).

There is a number of particularly significant pieces of legislation and policy changes that have been enacted within the last 20 years which are summarised below. However, what has been particularly significant to the sector in terms of policy changes, may vary depending on the type of further education institution. For instance, for someone working in community-based learning, policies related to vocational skills may be inconsequential. This study will use the policy changes detailed below as an initial framework but draw from the participants' other significant milestones. The policies reviewed below have been read as significant particularly from a college perspective. However, even from that limited perspective, there are too many policies to include them all. The ones selected have been shown to have a lasting effect.

#### 2.4 Significant policy changes in further education in the previous two decades

The period from 2001-2010 was a period of change for further education teachers seeing the introduction of the Skills for Life strategy, Success for All and The Education Act 2002. The Skills for life Strategy ran from 2001- 2011 (Department of

Business Innovation and Skills 2011) so is within the scope of the Veterans' careers in further education. In 2001 the Skills Strategy of the Blair government launched the 'Skills for Life Strategy' as a response to the Moser Report 'A Fresh Start'. In 1999 Moser reported on large-scale primary research to reveal that, 'one in five adults have low literacy' (Moser 1999 p.16) and 'nearly half of all adults in Britain have numeracy skills below the level expected of an 11 year old' (Moser 1999 p.18). Skills for Life injected 5 billion pounds into improving the basic literacy and numeracy skills of the adult population (House of Commons 2008). The strategy introduced a prescribed curriculum for adults with defined levels, offered a suite of free courses backed with centrally produced resources and widely recognised qualifications. Courses were delivered not only through colleges but also less traditional outlets such as family centres, job centres and workplaces. The multi-organisational approach reportedly worked in that it brought 5.7 million adults into learning providers with '3.25 million adults in England' achieving a nationally-recognised qualification by 2010' (Department of Business Innovation and Skills 2011).

From a practitioner perspective, Skills for Life may have had an impact on the environment that the Veterans were working on in terms of funding and public visibility. There may also be particular significance for female practitioners in the study. A government funded, National Research and Development Centre (NRDC) study showed that 77% of the Skills for Life teachers were female (Cara *et al* 2010 p.10) suggesting a highly gendered dimension to the experience of teaching as part of the strategy.

In retrospect, the Skills for Life national strategy has been (positively) evaluated in various studies (BIS 2012, FETL 2021) with emphasis on the impacts for learners.

Research on the impact on teachers is less extensive but a NRDC study in 2010 does include the reflection of teachers who were involved.

For some teachers, the strategy has given a new standing and respectability to the field and the career in which they have worked for many years. Others perceive that the standards, targets and bureaucracy that have come with the initiative create administrative burdens and divert teachers from their commitment to social justice and their main business of improving learners' knowledge and skills (Cara *et al* 2010 p.6).

Similarly, research on the intended professionalisation of teachers entering the profession in response to the policy, quote Bill, a practitioner, who says of his Skills for Life training,

'I do not feel my skills were enhanced...The job opportunities are no better and my prospects for progression appear to be the same'  
(Dhillon *et al* 2011 p.19).

This indicates that teachers reported a variety of experiences both positive and negative. It will be interesting to see if Skills for Life has had any impact on the Veterans either as part of the working environment or in personal practical ways.

As part of the same wave of change by the Blair government, *Success for All* (DfES 2002) was introduced as part of the Education Bill of 2002 which sought to standardise the 'framework for accountability or standards' across further education (DfES 2002 p.7) and to increase government control around the 'qualifications and skills of teachers and trainers in colleges and work-based learning providers' (DfES 2002 p.18). Further education providers such as ITPs, work-based learning providers and community learning providers were brought

under the scrutiny of the Common Inspection Framework. The Institute for Learning (IfL) was also established as part of the focus on professionalising the workforce.

Standardisation culminated in the Further Education Teachers' Qualifications (England) Regulations 2007 and the 2007 Further Education Teachers' Continuing Professional Development and Registration (England) Regulations (UK Parliament 2010 p.1). These pieces of legislation will certainly have had impact on people working in further education at that time as they introduced mandatory rules around training, qualifications, IFL membership and continuing professional development (CPD). The majority of these innovations were revoked by acts of Parliament in 2012 and 2013, however, the impact on the Veterans and whether the policies had any influence on their veteran-ness will be of interest.

The Leitch Review (2006) continued to focus further education on the economic necessity of increasing literacy and numeracy skills but also the need to strategize further education towards delivering 'economically valuable skills' (p.7) rather than learning for its own sake. It also started to shift the onus for funding skills development from government towards employers and individuals. Schemes such as 'Train 2 Gain' came directly from the Leitch Review and increased the agency of employers in deciding which knowledge and skills are of value and which are not. From a practitioner perspective, it narrowed the curricula towards immediate economic gains (Hartley *et al* 2010). From a government perspective, it failed in shifting the burden of funding towards employers as much as it had been hoped (The National Audit Office 2009). The scheme was cancelled by the Cameron Coalition in 2010.

The Wolf Report (2011), brought about changes to apprenticeships and introduced 'programmes of study' style curriculums for 16-19 year-olds (DoE 2015).

Programmes of study gave a more school style of approach to courses where the learners' main course was embedded within a curriculum containing other elements such as English, maths and ICT. The Wolf Report also initiated the 2014 policy change that mandated all learners under 18 to retake their maths and English GCSE until they achieved a C (4). This policy was unpopular in further education. For example, Igoe (2014, n.p.) calls the enforcement of the re-take rule 'a Dickensian thrashing being used as a substitute for proper care and attention'. This policy is an example of how government enforce policy changes through funding mechanisms. Colleges who do not enrol 95 per cent of eligible students risk having funding withdrawn from any future allocation (Education and Skills Funding Agency 2022, 2025). (Funding pressures will be discussed in 2.5).

The Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning (CAVTL) report in 2013, increased the focus on the interests of employers. This Commission looked at vocational further education and emerged with a straightforward titular message that, 'It's about work' (title page CAVTL 2013). The CAVTL report gave a vision that the purpose of post-16 vocational education is to act as a conduit for industry and to get young people into economic activity as quickly as possible with least outlay from the Exchequer. CAVTL (Mc Loughlin 2013) suggested that the needs of employers were to be given the highest priority with constant dialogue providing direction to educational providers.

CAVTL had a profound impact on further education and potentially on the Veterans' work in the absolute focus on vocationalism. However, the resulting changes to the apprenticeship systems and the promotion of employers' interests has not, in the estimation of some commentators, been successful. Giving a view from an education and skills think tank, Richmond (2020) believes that the

apprenticeship developments driven by CAVTL were unsuccessful in promoting the economic results of an employer led system that was intended. He cites the 'gaming' of the funding system by employers (Richmond 2020) as evidence that the simple vision contained in CAVTL was flawed. Keep (2015) observed that in any specialist area what employers want 'spans a spectrum' (p.5) creating practical problems for translation into curriculum and qualification implementation 'in the real world'.

The CAVTL report relies on the premise that employers can be viewed as a homogenous group who speak with one collective voice. This could be criticised as being as flawed as the oversimplified picture of further education. Government records reveal that 99.9% <sup>2</sup> of all UK businesses are classed as small or medium enterprises (SME) (OfNS 2019), 76% are sole traders (DfBEI 2016) with only 15% of sole traders being part of a business association or trade network. From this, it can be extrapolated that what the majority of employers want further education to be is not fully known.

Despite the difficulty of interpreting the future needs of industry, the Sainsbury Review (2016) continued with the emphasis on vocational skills and produced the 'Post 16 Skills Plan' prompting the creation of T Levels roll out in 2020/1. T levels put even greater emphasis on work experience, with the intention of increasing the agency of employers in the training process. However, T Levels have been beset by early difficulties of low recruitment and low completion rates (Maris *et al* 2024). On the practical localised level needed to successfully implement T Levels, many employers were not able or willing to take the initiative envisioned by Sainsbury

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<sup>2</sup> This was still the case in 2023

(2016). For example, Ofsted's 2023 review found that 'employers are poorly informed about the content and structure of T levels' (Ofsted 2023 n.p.).

The 2022 Skills and Post-16 Education Bill sought to rectify the perceived communication gaps between further education and employers by introducing a:

system of accountability by extending existing powers for the Secretary of State to intervene where colleges have failed to meet local needs, to direct structural change where required to secure improvement (DfE 2021 p.4).

It might be noted that the 2022 Act marked a change of tone in the continuing policy quest to centralise the needs of industry in further education. The language of 'compliance' (p.5) is attached to engagement and 'direct collaboration between employers and providers' (p.8) to implement local skills improvement plans. The onus is placed on further education providers to understand the needs of local employers and adjust their curriculum and delivery accordingly. The tone of threat in the quote above is enacted through the enforcement mechanism of Ofsted via the inspection sub-judgement to grade 'The contribution of colleges and designated institutions to meeting skills needs' (Ofsted 2022 para 289). Thus, the instrumentalist train of intention for further education that runs through Wolf (2011), CAVTL (2013) and Sainsbury (2016) continues but with increased pressure for institutions and practitioners to prove compliance with the externally mandated policy to place immediate economic outcomes at the heart of their provision.

## 2.5 Further education funding

The funding for further education is significant in terms of establishing the context of the research because it provides one of the most important driving forces for how the sector has developed. Gleeson *et al* (2015 p.4) introduce a metaphor of

funding being a system of 'pulleys and levers' (along with audit and inspection) that keep the sector in line with the government skills agenda. Applied to the further education workforce themselves, funding pulls and pushes the amount and type of work available, pulling in new recruits and pushing workers out of poorly funded areas. As such, funding arrangements have a direct impact on the Veterans this study focuses on.

The complexity of further education funding can be labyrinthine:

It is possible for one classroom to contain students studying the same qualification, who are funded in four different ways, with four different funding rates and four different criteria for funding. (Augar 2019 p.126).

Unlike schools or universities, further education is funded from a wide range of sources which adds complexity to creating a financially sustainable and stable workforce. In this area again the administrative network is continually reinvented preventing continuity (Orr 2020). From 2001-2010 the Learning and Skills Council 'was at one time the largest (in terms of spending power) quasi-governmental body in Europe' (Keep 2021 p.7) which gave way to the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) from 2010-2017 and then the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) from 2017 to 2025 when it became part of the Department for Education (DfE 2025b). Changes of government add to the lack of continuity around funding, for example the uncertainty around the proposed de-funding of many Level 3 qualifications (House of Commons 2025).

Adult funding is even more complex (Lewis and Bolton 2023) with some money coming from the ESFA in the form of the Adult Education Budget (changed to the Adult Skills Fund in 2024 DfE 2025b) but also from funding streams such as devolved mayoral authorities (for example West of England Combined Authority,

WoECA) which target adult funding by post-code which can change at any time, meaning that an address may be eligible for funding at the start of the year but not at the end (WoECA 2024). Other funders include: The National Skills Fund, UK Shared Prosperity Fund, Department of Work and Pensions, Advanced Learner Loans, directly from employers and Office for Students higher education funding. Additionally, there are capital funding sources for specific projects such as language classes funded by the United Nations or regional Institutes of Technology (Lewis and Bolton 2023). There are also full cost courses with no loan or funding opportunities where the learners pay the full fee. In the community funding may come from local government, charities or the health service.

The further education context as a workplace exists within an environment of constant financial pressure (Cruikshanks 2024). Further education funding is generally not part of the UK government's 'protected' funding categories. The legislation that protects education funding refers largely to schools leaving further education as a legitimate target for government intervention whenever public finances are strained (Brien 2023). Since the introduction of 'austerity' economic measures by the Coalition Government in 2010 (Finance Act 2010), the workforce has coped with ever-decreasing financial resources. Further education has not been alone in feeling the impact of funding cuts. Education, alongside other state funded services has seen a significant fall in the proportion of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) that is apportioned to it. Education spending generally fell from 5.4% of GDP to 3.9% from 2011 to 2019 (Bolton 2021 p.6). This may only be a 1.5% drop but it equates to around seven billion pounds.

Colleges and sixth forms have seen a long-term decline in spending per student relative to schools. Further education spending per student aged

16–18 in 2022–23 was £6,800, which is lower than spending per pupil in secondary schools and only 11–12% greater than in primary schools having been more than two times greater in the early 1990s (Sibieta 2022 p.9).

Further education colleges and sixth forms have seen the largest cuts within the education sector. The Institute for Fiscal Studies gives the figure of 12% for 16-18 funding with either 37% or 50% for adult education depending on whether apprenticeships are included (Sibieta 2022). The inclusion of apprenticeship funding is significant as it gives an example of the impact of changes in political policy on funding sources and hence the operation of further education and further education employment. The 'Annual Spending Report for Education' in 2019 noted that, 'Specific spending on apprenticeships rose by 36% in real terms between 2009–10 and 2018–19' (IFS 2019 p.65). Although apprenticeship numbers have fluctuated, between a high of 521,000 in 2012 to a low of 376,000 in 2018 (Powell 2020) and have failed in many of the aspects desired by government, they have still had a significant impact on the work available to further education practitioners and potentially workforce utilisation.

The introduction of T Levels <sup>3</sup> (during the writing of this thesis) had the potential to bring about another wave of changes to the workforce. Funding changes for the 2020 academic year provide a T Level learner with funding up to £11,168 for a two year programme (ESFA 2020), compared to around £8,400 over two years for a current 16-19 Programme of Study including work experience (ESFA 2020).

Colleges are manipulated by the financial incentive to make the curriculum change

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<sup>3</sup> The future of T levels is under review since the change of government in 2024

as quickly as they can, causing fluctuations in the amount and types of jobs required.

This funding instability seemingly linked to the introduction of new qualifications are likely to have impacted directly on the experiences of the study participants. One reason for this is this instability often results in restructuring exercises in colleges and, as part of those, redundancies. The repeated waves of redundancy in the sector suggest that funding cuts and funding changes compound to produce instability in the workforce. 23,000 people have been made redundant from the further education sector since 2010 (UCU 2018). Hadlow College in Tonbridge had seen seven rounds of redundancy before it became the first college to declare insolvency under the rules for further education colleges in 2019 (Linford 2019).

The financial precarity of further education is an inescapable backdrop for this piece of research and will have formed the working environment that the participants have experienced.

## 2.6 Audit and Inspection

The culture of audit and inspection provide part of the working context for the participants in this study. To continue the 'pulley and lever' metaphor suggested by Gleeson *et al* (2015 p.4), alongside funding, the other force manipulating the sector are quality assurance systems of audit and inspection. Ofsted is the main judge of the quality of provision but various parts of further education adhere to other regimes such as Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), Office for Students (OfS), British Council, Care Quality Commission (CQC), and many subject skills or professional bodies. Awarding bodies such as Pearson and City & Guilds also constantly monitor the quality of provision and assessment decisions.

Ofsted inspections undoubtedly pose the highest risk in terms of the mechanism of accountability that further educational providers and individual practitioners are exposed to (Munoz-Chereau *et al* 2025). Ofsted have historically produced a grade or label that can decide the future of an organisation as a business and as an employer. In a competitive sector, education providers use successful grades in their advertising to gain market share; (e.g. 'Join an Ofsted Outstanding college' Hartpury College 2020). Ofsted themselves are aware of what they refer to as the 'undesirable incentives of inspection' (Ofsted 2017 p.1). Ofsted's aim of removing the one grade judgement in favour of a 'score card' of grades has so far proved to be complex for further education. Due to the variety of provision types within GFE, colleges are generating reports with around 15 traffic light style scores on a five point scale (Ofsted 2026). This may reduce the one line marketability of judgements but could also increase the pressure on practitioners.

Audit and inspection have the potential to exacerbate stress and damage the mental health of education workers.

According to the UK's Health and Safety Executive, teaching staff and education professionals report the highest rates of work-related stress, depression and anxiety in Britain (Ofsted 2019 p.4).

For these educational professionals, the experience of audit will have been a regular one. Further education is a highly regulated sector in terms of oversight.

Internal regimes to quality assure education can potentially add to the atmosphere of threat, with the University and College Union citing them as the highest occurring issue requiring their dispute intervention for further education members (UCU 2025). For this study, the context of threat from quality regimes will be explored

with a focus on how the practitioners cope with the stress, how useful they find it for their practice development and whether their attitudes have changed over time.

## 2.7 The further education workforce

In 2022 there were 205,200 people working in further education in the UK (Education Statistics Service 2023). Of these 81,400 were teachers, 50,200 support workers of some kind, 19,200 managers and 17,100 leaders (*ibid.*). For the purposes of this study all of these groups will be considered ‘practitioners.’

Although the main focus of the study is on teaching, many people’s jobs include multiple roles or a history of moving between support, teaching and managing. Part of the interest for the study is to see how roles may change or interact to extend a person’s career.

The key issue for this project is around the persistence of the practitioners to get into and then stay in their profession. Press headlines suggest that retaining teachers in further education is a pervasive problem. An *FE News* article (2.3.20) titled ‘Teaching profession is facing acute recruitment and retention challenges’ gives concerning information that 40% of teachers will leave the profession within five years.

Teachers are much more likely to exit during their first few years of teaching—1 in 5 new teachers leave the profession after their first two years, while 4 in 10 leave after five years. These high exit rates are increasing for each successive teaching cohort (Editorial *FE News* 2020).

However, the article draws its data from an Education Policy Institute (Sibieta 2020) report that is exclusively based on schools which illustrates a pervasive problem with trying to separate the issues specific to further education. Whilst there

may be some overlap around sixth forms, there cannot be an assumed application to the further education sector.

ETF figures reveal that data gathered from the further education sector shows that there is a 12% yearly turnover for teaching staff (ETF 2019 p.24). This is a less dramatic figure which shows correlation with other public sector professional jobs (Nursing 11.9%: NHS 2019). Further education data (SIR 2019) does not break down the 12% statistic by years served so if there is a predominance of early career teachers leaving and late career teachers remaining this will not be shown.

Redundancy appears from the statistics as a reason for leaving the profession: '51% of colleges reported having voluntary redundancies and 62% reported having compulsory redundancies in 2019/20' (AoC 2022 p.8).

Workload is also cited as a reason for leaving teaching. Government analysis of the reasons for leaving teaching show: 'Workload, government policy, and lack of support from leadership' (DfE 2018 p.2) as the main reasons. Again, the research is largely based on school focused data but the Department of Education (2018) research gives a more nuanced picture; 'Teachers' decisions to leave the profession were generally driven by the accumulation of a number of factors, over a sustained period of time' (DfE 2018 p.6). Specific behavioural incidents and their issues around their own performance also emerge as part of the pressures (*ibid.*). It seems likely that these factors may have been exacerbated by the COVID epidemic.

It is likely that the participants in this study may have encountered similar issues but they have decided not to leave the profession. These highlighted issues will

serve as a background when considering the pressures that the further education practitioners have been subject to and how they have coped with them.

## 2.8 Further education pay and gender pay gap

The Institute for Fiscal Studies has calculated the median average salary for college full-time teachers is £34,500 (IFS 2023 (b) p.3). The UK Government Statistics Service give a more nuanced figure of £33,996 for female teachers and £35,170 for males (2022/23 data set UK Statistics Service). This compares favourably with the overall median average salary for the UK in 2022 of £33,000 (Statista 2023). However, the ETF give a much lower figure of £28,600 (ETF 2020b p.7). Although the ETF figure is approximately three years out of date the average 2-2.5% wage increase would not account for the difference.

The discrepancy is another example of the lack of cohesion in data collection and availability for further education. The difference in figures appears to be caused by differences in what is being counted as further education. The Statistics Service data is drawn solely from general further education and tertiary colleges, whilst the ETF data took a wider view of what constitutes further education and included other types of providers. It must be deduced that further education salaries outside general and tertiary further education bring down the mean average by being significantly lower.

Whichever figure is used, when compared to the average salaries for the vocational backgrounds of some further education teachers, it becomes apparent that many practitioners will have accepted a wage reduction to stay in teaching compared to other professions. For instance, £37,000 for a nurse (RCN 2023) and £58,108 for an engineer (Excel 2022).

Wages for further education practitioners have traditionally lagged behind teaching staff in other education sectors. The Education Statistics Survey give £10,000 as the 'difference in median salary between secondary teachers and teachers in further education colleges in 2022/23' (2025 p.4). When put into context of the cost of living this means that:

between 2010–11 and 2022–23, the median salary for a school teacher has fallen by 14%, while the median salary for a college teacher has fallen by 19% (Institute for Fiscal Studies 2023 p.3).

Against a background of rising inflation, it can be seen that working in further education is not a choice based on financial gain.

Despite having such a high proportion of female staff, further education still displays a relatively high gender pay gap. In 2022 FE Week reported that although the gap was slowly narrowing, some colleges reported excessive gaps, the widest being the hourly rate for men being 60.4% higher than that for women at an institution in the north of England although this figure did include all staff not just teachers (Nott 2022).

## 2.9 Further education contracts

ETF statistics show that only 74.6% of further education staff were employed on permanent contracts (ETF 2020b p. 23). Other staff were employed on different types of casualised contracts ranging from people employed on an *ad hoc* basis through to supply agencies and in-house zero hours contracts. The ETF figures show variation across the sector with local authority provision most likely to employ in a casualised way and private learning providers least likely (*ibid.*)

The University and College Union expresses concern about the impact of casualised contracts on staff. A survey of 798 staff (teaching and non-teaching) working under these conditions found that:

71% of respondents reported that they believed their mental health had been damaged by working on insecure contracts, while 45% reported that they believed their working conditions had damaged their physical health (UCU 2019 p.4).

In such a small sample of practitioners, casualised contracts may not have been part of their experience but it is clearly an issue for over 25% of the further education workforce.

How jobs are designated as teaching or non-teaching may also be an issue for the Veterans. Workforce data for colleges in England show that although the total median number of employees rose between 2014 and 2019 the median number of teaching staff fell from 250 to 231. The greatest increases were in 'learner-facing technical staff' and 'support staff' (ETF 2019 p.21). Research for the Gatsby Foundation confirmed this finding. A sample of 116 further education providers looking at technical or vocational subject areas found a whole variety of roles such as learning coach, instructor, progress tutor and technicians who had teaching as at least part of their job role but were not categorised or paid as teachers (York Consulting 2022 p.5). Such jobs also allow institutions to offer lower wages and to avoid putting these employees into the Teachers' Pension Scheme, allocating other schemes with a smaller percentage of employer contribution (TPS = 23.68% vs. [thepeoplespension.co.uk](https://thepeoplespension.co.uk) = 3%).

## 2.10 Further education initial teacher training

Although many areas of further education are highly regulated, the training of further education teachers is surprisingly unregulated. Apart from a brief window between 2007 and 2013 (BIS 2012) there has been no requirement for further education teachers to be qualified to teach. Many job advertisements for the sector make it clear that vocational experience is considered more important. An example from the Department of Work and Pensions states 'We are always looking for people from industry to get into teaching so don't worry if you have never worked in education before' (DWP 2026). This suggests that pedagogical skills are either not necessary or that they can be learnt easily whilst teaching.

Although many college-based further education institutions do require staff to take some form of teaching qualification whilst in-service, this is by no means universal or cohesive in approach. A system of awarding body initial teacher training (ITT) qualifications has been available for decades, usually separated into Level 3, 4 and 5 qualifications that can either be taken separately or together. Awarding body (e.g. Pearson or City and Guilds) ITT qualifications are renewed periodically and replaced by new awards with different names. Universities also offer qualifications such as Level 5 diplomas, Level 6 certificates and Level 7 post graduate certificates with a variety of names. Apart from a brief period between 2007 and 2013, the requirement for teacher training has not been enshrined in law. The Education and Training Foundation recommend a qualification at Level 5 or above with a size value of 120 credits (ETF 2018). However, workforce data (ETF 2019) shows that 10% of the workforce have no teaching qualification at all and a further 11% have only a 12 credit Level 3 Award in Education and Training. The 30-hour Level 3 qualification is a 'introductory, knowledge-based teaching qualification has

no minimum teaching practice requirement (Pearson 2017 p.5). This course is intended as an introduction to the sector and a stepping-stone to further training rather than an end in itself. Despite the lack of regulation, ETF workforce data for 2019 shows that the percentage of teachers who hold a full teaching qualification at either Level 5,6 or 7 is approximately 66% showing a slight gradual rise over the past three years (ETF 2019). The reason for this is not given but it could relate to precarity and attempts to feel secure in their work.

It will be considered beyond the scope of this project to comment on the impact of having only two thirds of the workforce trained at teachers for their job. The impact of this context on the individual will, however, be considered. For the participants, the experience of initial training may be long ago but the type and duration of qualification, whether they trained pre-service or in-service and the value they place on the knowledge and skills gained will all be of interest inasmuch as it forms part of their professional identity.

## 2.11 Age

Older workers are a small but growing proportion within further education. It is expected that the participants in my study will fall into the over 50 age range and possibly into the over 60 range. Further education sector workforce data show that the median age of a further education teacher is 47 and 50 for those in leadership roles (ETF 2020b p.32 and ESS 2022). Between 2014 and 2019 ETF figures show a rise from 10% to 14% for the over 60s with the ESS figures giving a figure of 14.9% for the year 2022 (ETF 2020b p.32, ESS 2022).

Issues around ageing within the further education workforce and decisions to remain in work or retire are relevant to the investigation of Veteran status. For

example, the repealing of mandatory retirement at 65 in 2011 was brought about by the enactment of the Pensions Act (2011). Gradual increases in the state pension age will mean workers will not be eligible for state payments until 67 in the 2020s, 68 in the 2030s and eventually 69 in the 2040s (Pension Act 2011).

Teachers, along with other workers may therefore be staying in their roles later in life and extending careers beyond the traditional pattern. Moreover, the over 50s now make up nearly a third of the UK workforce (27.6% ONS 2023) and Office for National Statistics (ONS) figures show that there was a steady increase in 'workers aged between 50 and 64 years (up 168,000 to 9.31 million)' from November 2019 to January 2020 (ONS 2020). In addition, there were: '120,000 more over-65s, in work in March-May 2019 compared to the same period the previous year' (ONS 2019). Women in the over 50s group have seen particular changes in their working patterns due to the changes to the State Pension age for women contained in the State Pension Act (1995). This equalised the retirement age for men and women at 65. The change has resulted in fewer women retiring between the ages of 60 and 65 years (ONS March 2020).

Private pension membership may also have a bearing on decisions to stay in work or retire. Peeters (2019) notes that responsibility for amassing sufficient funds for retirement has passed from the state to the individual. However, he believes that the process of 'responsibilisation' of the individual has been too quick, leaving some older people without an understanding of the altered emphasis, creating the risk of financial vulnerability. This study will therefore consider whether the Veterans may have been directly or indirectly affected by this shift towards personal responsibility.

This study will consider whether aspects of ageism; both from employers, colleagues or as limiting self-fulfilling prophecies towards themselves (Swift *et al*, 2017), had an impact on the working lives of the participants. Age is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act (2010), which sets out four types of discrimination: direct, indirect, harassment and victimisation (Equality Act 2010). Direct discrimination in this context could be around having fewer employment opportunities, pay or conditions due to age. Indirect discrimination is defined as:

‘putting rules or arrangements in place that apply to everyone, but that put someone with a protected characteristic at an unfair disadvantage’ (Equality Act 2010 p.2).

There is potentially a large variety of ways that the Veterans may have experienced indirect discrimination as it can operate in an employment situation without victims always recognising a habituated behaviour or system as unfair. For example, Veterans may have experienced a change in the way they are viewed at work over time. Age-based bias based on stereotyped assumptions of older workers may have impacted the Veterans’ career pathways or decisions to stay in post.

Swift and Steeden (2020) carried out a useful review of literature and media representations of older workers. They found many of the negative stereotypes of older people were drawn from the popular media. They found terms such as: ‘grey tsunami’, ‘demographic cliff’ (p.9), encouraged negative bias. The media regularly fuels ideas of generational rifts with stories about ‘boomers’ versus ‘millennials’ around everything from property ownership to Brexit (Jones 2019) adding to bias and potentially discrimination. In the workplace, perceptions of older workers included beliefs that they have lower levels of performance, less ability to learn, and are more costly than younger workers (Swift and Steeden 2020 p.7).

Pickard (2016) introduces a complex picture of ageing saying, 'life course cannot be understood without examining the intersections with class and gender in particular' (p.19). On the impact of gender Pickard asserts that:

workers are configured as 'old' at vastly different points in the life course depending on both the needs of the employment and the classed nature of the work. In general women are perceived to be 'older' than men at any given age in a way that negatively impacts their employment prospects (2016 p.36).

This is a useful concept when examining potential negative stereotyping experience by older women in the workplace, particularly as I hope to include women amongst the participants in the study. Both descriptive and prescriptive stereotypes can become self-fulfilling prophecies, as they can affect how older people view themselves, their own capabilities and therefore the kinds of tasks and activities they engage with (Ng & Feldman, 2012; Swift 2017). Intersections with other protected characteristics will be considered alongside aspects of ageism to reflect how discrimination operates in the practitioners' working lives.

## 2.12 Gender

Pickard (2016) discusses the dual-disadvantage of older women in the workforce describing 'flexible female' workers who are 'willing to accept poorer conditions and rates of pay' (Pickard 2016 p.42). However, many factors influence the reasons why women may find themselves in this weakened position such as a pattern of exiting and re-entering the workforce due to caring responsibilities (PWC 2025). If this is reflected in older further education practitioners, it would suggest that women may experience more insecure working conditions than men of a similar age in the sector. Unfortunately, the quantitative data for further education does not

break down information on zero hours contracts and casual staff by age and sex (SIR 26 2019 p.9). For my thesis, the importance of investigating the patterns within the work histories of participants in this study is therefore clear.

Gendered differences in behaviours around applying for jobs may also have relevance on the career patterns of the Veterans. In 2014, it was claimed that women only apply for jobs if they meet 100% of the requirements (Mohr 2014). Mohr's claims were disproved but later U.K. government-sponsored research revealed small gender differences in the confidence to apply for jobs. Men were found to be more likely to apply for jobs for which they were underqualified (meaning skills, experience and qualification) which was explained as 'gender differences in self-perceptions of meeting the overall requirements' (Nicks *et al* 2022 p.30). Research in America for Yale University concluded that employers tended to judge women on proven results while men were judged on potential (Shue 2021).

### 2.13 Career longevity and career patterns

The data available on career patterns for further education is limited. The data produced by the Education Statistics Service and the previous data collections by the Education and Training Foundation are aimed at providing employer information and do not provide insight into career longevity or patterns.

Available data often excludes further education. For example, a report produced for the Department of Education in 2018 on 'Teachers working longer' excluded further education teachers but does offer useful questions about career longevity. The report found that the 'physical, mental and emotional demands' (Teachers working longer group 2018 p.4) of the role were an important aspect of teachers deciding to either keep working or retire. They also cite positive employment practices that can

help support teachers towards working until later in life such as offering 'alternative pathways' (*ibid.*) to allow some step back from the classroom. For the participants in the study it will be interesting to discover if their career patterns have allowed any alternative pathways that have facilitated their longevity. The report also raised an issue over 'considerable evidence gaps' in their data because 'relatively few teachers currently work into their sixties' (Teacher working longer group 2018 p.14). The gap suggests that to develop a clearer understanding of what constitutes veteran-ness, it would be advantageous to recruit at least some participants from the over 60 group.

Chiong's (2017) study also excluded further education teachers but offers some useful insights into why people remain in the teaching profession. Chiong suggests that early career positive experiences can have a sustaining influence in teachers' later careers. Another of Chiong's findings was one not been noted in other literature. The qualitative evidence from the long-serving teachers reported that they stayed because they believed they were good teachers. Chiong (2017, p.25) considers this factor to be particularly important:

their own perceived professional mastery, which, in our judgement, is perhaps the most important motivation for long-serving teachers, particularly in light of its profound interconnections with other reasons for staying.

It is their own perception of their ability that is the crucial part. External judgements of a teachers' ability are not as important as their own evaluation in terms of keeping them motivated in the profession. They conclude that intrinsic and altruistic motivators strengthen over time.

Chiong's (2017) conclusion contrasts with the findings of Day and Sammon (2006).

0-3 years- Commitment: Support and challenge, 4-7 years – Identity and efficacy in the classroom, 8-15 years – Managing changes in role and identity, 16-23 years – Work-life tensions: Challenges to motivation and commitment, 24-30 years – Challenges to sustaining motivation, 31+ years – Sustaining/declining motivation, coping with change, looking to retire (Day and Sammon 2006 p. ix).

The classification of career phases by chronology appears to lack nuance in that it suggests my participants will be experiencing challenges to their motivation.

However, Day and Sammons' do add a more chequered picture than the defined phases quoted above suggest through their qualitative evidence. For example, some teachers in the late phases of their careers felt 'tired and trapped' (p.114) whilst others had 'sustained motivation and commitment' (*ibid.* p114). They link sustained motivation to career trajectories citing the benefits of 'promotion' on 'motivation and self-efficacy' (p.97) due to the sense that promotion provides recognition of the value of their work.

The idea of career 'phases' may be helpful when looking at further education career patterns and in understanding the factors that influence participants achieving veteran status. As discussed above, the vocational nature of some of further education teaching, means that many staff have had more than one career. As previously noted, 'FE teachers' occupational biographies and transition into FE are less linear than those entering school and HE, though not exclusively so' (Gleeson *et al* 2015 p.5). This means a career phase may start later in life.

However, for less vocationally related subjects in further education there may still have been a traditional progression from university to a full-time PGCE and then into a first teaching role. For my thesis, trying to understand the phases of a career

will need to be considered when planning the data collection approach. Information about how the participants came to enter further education teaching, moves around employers, promotions, demotions and other significant events will need to be collected.

When drawing to the end of a career, making a decision about when to retire may be influenced by a myriad of factors. Pickard (2016 p.43) is critical of the 'discourse of choice' that surrounds ageing and retirement and suggests that people are encouraged to see later life as a series of choices, when there may actually be very few choices available to them. She points to macro-economics as the main driver for what appears to be choice:

Retirement, meanwhile, has always been used as a device for regulating the labour supply in the interests of the employers. In the 1950s post-war-reconstruction period in the UK, pressure was placed on older workers to delay leaving work. By the 1980s early retirement was the vogue because of youth unemployment. By the early 1990s declining birth rates and increased life expectancy led governments to try to reverse the trend (Pickard 2016 p.35).

Within her critique of choice, Pickard suggests that for people working in middle class professions that offer relatively secure employment, higher salaries and less physical impact, more choices may be available. When applied to the current study it could mean that for people working in the ostensibly middle-class profession of teaching the choice to work longer is a choice based on enjoyment rather than necessity.

However, there are many uncertainties around whether further education teaching would fit into the assumptions of a middle-class profession (Chan and Goldthorpe 2004, Bourdieu 2010). As previously stated, further education college practitioners may earn substantially less than other types of teachers, limiting their choices. The characterisation of personal class is also questionable. For further education teachers, the mixture of academic and vocational backgrounds suggests class origins and career patterns may be very varied. Consequently, further education lecturers may have experienced the health impacts of working class upbringings followed by substantial parts of their working lives spent in manual occupations. I will therefore, in this thesis, gather detailed work histories from participants to better understand their attitudes to their current work and their plans for the future.

## **Chapter 3 Literature Review**

### **3.1 Strategy for Reading**

This chapter will explore existing research pertinent to the aims of the study. As explained in the Context chapter, my research is using a broad definition of further education that includes youth and adult learning environments from colleges to church halls and everything in between. To get a broad scope of literature, a variety of search terms have been used as working synonyms for further education such as: FES, post-compulsory education, lifelong learning and vocational education.

In terms of time periods for the literature search, I have used the 20 years of the Veterans' careers as a guide. The initial searches were carried out in 2020/1 so early 2000 was an initial starting date. However, where works were considered foundational, this limit has been waived and no limit set.

This chapter is presented in three sections. In the first section (3.2), key terms from the literature are explored. Many of these terms are contested or require contextualisation. In exploring these terms, I seek to unearth some tensions and contestations. The second section (3.3) seeks to establish the position of further education in UK society and look more critically at the picture of further education that emerged from the Context chapter which identified a policy focus that was mainly instrumental in character. I have explored that theme further in the literature review with a view to understanding the underpinning reasons why further education remains less valued than schools and higher education within society (Thompson 2019). In the third section (3.4), I have explored literature that seeks to establish the possible subject positions of the participants in the study. This section

gives a counter-balance to the instrumentalist view of further education with reading that explores a more learner-centred, transformational view of learning in further education with a view to understanding why the Veterans remain in further education.

### 3.2 Key and problematic terms for literature

In this section I will outline and problematise some of the concepts that are key to understanding the literature.

#### 3.2.3 Neoliberalism

The term neoliberalism is used throughout this study with the recognition that it can be a contested term. Hall (2011) argues that the word is 'reductive, sacrificing attention to internal complexities and geo-historical specificity' (Hall 2011 p.706).

My study begins from just such a reductive position but during the process of research, the complexities and specificities of neoliberalism in the UK further education context will be explored.

As a starting point, I have used Harvey's (2007) definition. Neoliberalism is understood as:

a theory of political and economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade (Harvey 2007 p.2).

Dean (2012) adds that neoliberalism supposes that competition leads to more choice and better service and that it has gradually seeped into all areas of society including public services such as education. Davies (2014) concurs with Dean's (2012) description of the rationale for neoliberalism but he emphasises that the

choices made by governments produce inequality. Davies sees neoliberal policy as a process and a 'force' rather than a static belief system. Davies's explanation crystallises why the process of neoliberalisation is so disruptive for institutions and society.

This ethical and political vision is dominated by an idea of competitive activity, that is, the production of inequality. Competition and inequality are valued positively under neoliberalism (Davies 2014 p.2).

Neoliberal government policies target institutions and activities such as education that lie outside of the market, to introduce policies and create rules to achieve a market-like environment. In Davies's (2014) view this represents an active choice to produce winners and losers in society.

There remains a difficulty in defining neoliberalism. Jones and Ball (2023) point out that 'there is no neoliberal credo, or manifesto, no declaration of beliefs that sets out what the neoliberal project is' (p.5). For this thesis, potential problems of definition and visibility of neoliberal attitudes and actions in the careers of the Veterans, may be addressed by the useful division between small n and big N neoliberalism given by Peck (2013) and Ball (2016). Peck classes the large N neoliberalism as 'state-facilitated market rule' (Peck 2013 p.1) but Ball refines the focus to define small n neoliberalism as 'interpersonal relations, identity and subjectivity, how we value ourselves and value others, how we think about what we do' (Ball 2016 p.1047). Peck also suggests that evidence of neoliberalism should be sought in 'causal mechanisms, modes of intervention, hybrid formations, social forms and foibles, counter-mobilizations' (Peck 2013 p.153).

My interest lies in the interaction between big N policy and the small n localised impact. The fact that the Veterans have stayed in the sector suggests that either they have competed and prospered as required by big N or, they have found other ways of sustaining themselves. I intend to examine the long-term effects of neoliberalism on the working environment of further education and its role in shaping the quality of their veteran-ness.

### 3.2.4 Knowledge

The knowledge sought in this study is related to human interaction with the workplace. I would view this knowledge as socially constructed and personal based in a Weberian and Bourdieusian tradition as 'ongoingly constituted by human signification' (Grenfell 2008 p.46). Apple (2012) argues that it is necessary to situate 'knowledge' in the context of institutions, social conditions and educators themselves (Apple 2012 p.28). I would also add temporality to that list as, what is considered to be knowledge or valuable knowledge may change over time. This suggests that what is considered knowledge in the further education context in general shapes what is considered valuable for the teachers to know. As such, how knowledge is specified and recognised will have profound implications for the exploration of veteran-ness in the sphere of further education. Situated 'knowledges' and the value placed on these both by the participants themselves and their working contexts will be discussed at multiple points throughout this thesis to illuminate how it relates to veteran-ness.

However, Bathmaker's (2013) question, 'What is meant by 'knowledge' in vocational education qualifications and who decides?' foregrounds two of the fundamental tensions around the discourse on what is valuable knowledge in further education. Firstly, she focuses her question specifically on vocational

education. For my research, which encompasses further education beyond the vocational, the often presuppositional (Deer 2008), reductive emphasis on vocational knowledge as synonymous with further education is immediately problematic. The dominance of the discourse of vocationalism can threaten to eclipse the importance of non-vocational knowledge for teachers both in the curriculum and pedagogically, devaluing the situated social knowledge (Apple 2012) of specific contexts. For this thesis, I am seeking the covert situated pedagogical knowledge and emotional knowledge that is hidden behind the rhetoric of 'the conveyance of skills and certificates' (Allen & Goddard 2017 p.161). This knowledge may be situated in the vocational sphere and enmeshed within it but in the building of Veteran status, my definition of knowledge extends beyond the vocational.

The second part of Bathmaker's (2013) question concerns who decides what is meant by knowledge, which is a relevant question across the whole of further education. Bathmaker (2013) argues that for vocational qualifications, what is considered knowledge is dominated by employers and mediated by awarding bodies. Government policy has had a major role in forming the discourse of knowledge in further education and those policies focus on the value of the immediate monetary value of knowledge in the marketplace of employment. Since Bathmaker's 2013 article, the primacy of employers in directing what is considered knowledge in vocational education has increased. As discussed in 2.4, repeated policies have amplified the role of employers in stipulating what is valuable. For example, policy reviews such as CAVTL (2013) and Whitehead (2013) deemed 'low-level, confidence-building qualifications' (Ofqual 2024 n.p.) as valueless because they did not lead directly to work. Esmond and Atkins (2020 p.2) have

observed the formation of 'technical elites' within workplace learning for those deemed ready to move quickly into economically valuable occupations. This confirms Bathmaker's (2013, p.99) basic premise that it is the 'world of work' and the utility for employers' profit that directs what is considered as knowledge. It also suggests that the domination of the knowledge discourse by employers may lead to the devaluation of the situated curriculum knowledge developed by practitioners teaching SEND or people not ready for work and the disregarding of the social benefits of knowledge outside what is immediately marketable.

The domination of employers in what is deemed legitimate knowledge allows knowledge to be codified and used as a means of power and control (Freire 1970, Giroux 2020) to mould and direct people through their educational experiences. The words 'skills and knowledge' are often used as a bonded pair with 'behaviours' becoming their third sibling (Skills England 2025). Employers specify the knowledge, skills and behaviours (KSBs) that will make a person competent and economically productive in the workplace. The emphasis is focused on the 'knowing what' and 'knowing how' rather than hermeneutical knowledge of 'knowing why' (Terry 1997 p. 271). Within further education, knowledge is enmeshed with concepts of skills and behaviours but in awarding body specifications also separated, suggesting that performing a skill or adopting a behaviour does not require knowledge or a deeper understanding of why a skill or behaviour is structured in a certain way, the wider implications of that knowledge or skill and whether it could be envisioned differently. Within this context, knowledge is reduced, codified and specified into boxes to be ticked when achieved (e.g. installation electrician Skills England 2025).

The codification of behaviour linked to knowledge and skill shows the narrowing of the concept of knowledge when specified by employers. For example, in the specification for the Learning and Skills Teacher apprenticeship the first behaviour criteria to be met is, 'B1: Be resilient and adaptable when dealing with challenge and change, maintaining focus and self-control' (Skills England 2024 p.2). This starts to give an indication of the restrictions on knowledge for further education teachers. The valuable knowledge here would appear to be knowing how to be malleable to employment conditions.

This thesis views the knowledge of the Veterans as a valuable resource in the deconstruction of codified concepts of knowledge. In the literature review I will examine strands of the discourse around the knowledge and skills of teaching in further education which are intrinsic to literature on professionalism and professional identity in 3.4.

### 3.2.5 Social justice, oppression and emancipation within further education

The concept of social justice is important for this thesis because it features in a range of literature about further education (for example, Simmons 2010, Avis 2018). Within the literature selected for this chapter, the term is used in implied juxtaposition to neoliberal instrumentalism (Thrupp and Tomlinson 2005, Fulford *et al* 2023). However, it is acknowledged that this is reductive and requires amplification.

The problematic conception of the term 'social justice' occurs firstly within the perspective of the definer. Pijanowski and Brady (2020 p.3) point out that, 'The definition of social justice in education is neither universally agreed upon nor static' but they believe it should include 'concepts of fairness, social recognition, diversity, inclusion, and antibias'.

Simmons (2010 p.7) observes the way that successive governments conflate social justice agendas with economic interests in an ‘unproblematic fashion’ as if they are the same thing. For example, the Skills for Life (2008) policy outlined in 2.4, espoused a social justice agenda whilst also aiming to tackle industry skills gaps. Avis (2018) cautions that the terms social justice and social equity are not synonymous. He argues that the term equity emphasises equal opportunities in a restrictive way that fails to address the underlying issues of economically driven social stratification.

At best such a version has an affinity with a social democracy that seeks to soften structural inequality without posing a significant challenge to patterns of inequality (Avis 2018 p.185-186).

Including actively challenging patterns of inequality is then central to establishing an understanding of social justice. Thrupp and Tomlinson (2005) and Fulford, *et al* (2023) concur with the need for any definition of social justice to include a challenge to neoliberalism through the redistribution and fair allocation of resources.

However, in contrast to these broad and expansive definitions, Fulford *et al* (2023) also offer the concept of *educational* justice. This closer focus allows that individual educators can create ‘moments’ of educational justice by creating respectful, ‘nurturing’ learning environments that ‘challenge microaggressions and ‘give hope’ to learners (Fulford *et al* 2023 p.4). Social justice, can then be interpreted on small scale as well at a societal level.

My usage of the term ‘social justice’ within this thesis pertains particularly to the education system in England and can be understood to mean a system which

opens opportunities particularly for those in marginalised groups. This understanding contains the implication that the current education system does not historically or currently offer all members of society equal chances to succeed in education, bestowing unfair advantages on those from the upper strata of society. However, when interpreting the data on the careers of the Veterans, I will also incorporate educational justice (Fulford *et al* 2023).

Oppression is a term loaded with images of political unrest, violence and the restrictions of rights for certain groups. Freire's 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' (1970) is used as a source of reading in this thesis but the 'oppression' of Freire's divided Brazil is not used as analogous for the oppression experienced in English education. In the context of the UK and more specifically the English education system, 'oppression' is used in this thesis to mean not only the unfair and unequal access to a full range of material resources and reduced opportunities caused by overt or hidden bias but also the psychological oppression of damage to self-image caused by stereotyping, marginalisation and the resulting limiting of personal and group expectations (Corbett & Guilherme 2021).

Emancipation and emancipatory practice are terms that occur in the literature used to explore the motivations and subject positions of the participants in this thesis (Freire 1970, Shor 1996, Giroux 2020). Within the context of further education, the terms are used in connection with social justice with an understanding that the aim of emancipation is to enable learners to find and express their own position rather than adopt that of the teacher (Biesta 2007). It is used here as an overarching term in conjunction with concepts such as 'critical pedagogy' (Giroux 2020) and 'transformative teaching and learning' (McLaren 2002, Duckworth and Smith 2019) that seek to enable social justice.

Freire's concept of emancipatory education (1970, 1994, 2000) is a key concept in a strand current within the literature that sees the purpose of education as beyond a simplistic transfer of knowledge from teacher to learner into a practice of facilitating learners to question and challenge the dominant societal structures that disadvantage them. Writing in 2010 Giroux usefully summarised Freire's stance:

Freire rejected those regimes of educational degradation organized around the demands of the market, instrumentalized knowledge, and the priority of training over the pursuit of the imagination, critical thinking, and the teaching of freedom and social responsibility (Giroux 2010 p.716).

Here, Giroux makes a contrast between 'training' as part of an instrumentalist paradigm of skills training in opposition to an education that enables a personal or democratic agenda for learning. This is perhaps a rather simplistic division which is problematic when attempting to apply it to further education due to the centrality of the training aspects. Within my reading and application, I will be seeking clarity around whether or how emancipatory practice can be applied to my Veteran further education practitioners' experiences and if elements of skills training can be / have been synthesised with emancipatory learning.

### 3.2.6 Social class

Social class is an underlying theme within this thesis. Defining social class in the UK is highly problematic. As a point of reference, I draw on the framework of definition of social class provided by UK's largest independent producer of official statistics, the Office for National Statistics (ONS 2021):

- AB: Higher and intermediate managerial, administrative and professional occupations

- C1: Supervisory, clerical, and junior managerial, administrative and professional occupations
- C2: Skilled manual occupations
- DE: Semi-skilled and unskilled manual occupations; unemployed and lowest grade occupations

This purely economic definition gives a mono-dimensional picture of social class which might be said to be objective but does not offer the nuance required for qualitative research (Reay 1998 & 2013 b.). Other statistical descriptions attempt to include social aspects of class using data on people's highest qualification, housing tenure type and ethnic origins (National Statistics Socio-economic Classification ONS 2021). The adding of social components starts to suggest that social class is multi-faceted and the exact constituents are complex.

Taking a Weberian view of social class can expand the concept of social class to encompass the gradations of prestige and power that accompany wealth. Weber defined social class as follows:

We may speak of a 'class' when (1) a number of people have in common a specific causal component of their life chances, in so far as (2) this component is represented exclusively by economic interests in the possession of goods and opportunities for income, and (3) is represented under the conditions of the commodity or labour markets (Weber, 1978 p.927).

In other words, for Weber, class is not a community but a category of people who share similar economic life chances determined by their market situation. This understanding of social contrasts with status groups (based on social honour) and parties (based on political power). I have incorporated a Weberian understanding of economic class stratification with an inherent assumption that lower levels of

social class stratification will be associated with reduced prestige and power in comparison with higher levels.

However, I would also add Bourdieu's view of social class which provides some of the nuance needed in my thesis to explain how social class is reproduced through education, how it creates communities and influences people's characters. His explanation of the 'tacit' nature of social class implies that individuals within a social class will share certain modes of communication, values and expectations of which they are largely unaware (Bourdieu 1984, 2010). Whilst accepting the major themes of Bourdieu's analysis of social class, I also accept Reay's critique (2004) that an over-emphasis on social class as a defining category can subsume the elements of race, ethnicity and gender that modify how social class is experienced.

### 3.2.7 The working classes

Whether there is a cohesive socio-economic group that can be labelled 'working class' is contentious but maybe key for exploration in this study. As shown above, there are economic elements to the category of working class, however there is a vast difference in the experience of a person in a working class family where there is sufficient money for daily life compared to a family experiencing precarity of housing and food. Individual intersectional aspects of race, gender and ethnicity (Crenshaw 1989) will also modify the experience of class beyond the economic. I would add geography to that list of aspects that produce working class sensibilities, perspectives and language use (Bernstein 1971) in situationally distinct patterns. For example, it would be hard to say that a working class person in south London shares modes of communication, values and expectations (Bourdieu 1984, 2010) with a working class person in the Forest of Dean. For the experience of working

class dispositions within further education this may add a further situated element to the experience.

Within my thesis, I will be questioning the construction of working class dispositions in the sense that disposition and habitus produce 'different possible positions in social space' (Bourdieu 2010 p. xxix) but I recognise the huge variations of experience that will exist within any class grouping.

### 3.2.8 Class fraction

Where further education professionals fit within class divisions or whether they should be regarded as a distinct class fraction is also a potential issue. Chan and Goldthorpe (2004 p.386) regard teachers as middle class and place teachers just below the 'higher professions' in the hierarchy of UK society. However, it would seem anomalous to include further education teachers in this group. As detailed in the Context chapter, unlike schools and HE, teaching in further education is not an occupation that involves an advanced level of professional qualification, pay and job security.

Savage (2013) offers an alternative Bourdieusian framework with seven classes that some researchers in education (e.g. Reay 2013 b) have found useful, whilst still wishing to caution around any use of categorising descriptors. However, it is still difficult to define where further education teachers would fit. They could perhaps fit into the 'new affluent' grouping that has risen from working class origins. This grouping is described as people who:

have not benefitted from conventional routes through education to middle-class positions, but have nonetheless achieved relatively secure economic

positions and are also relatively socially and culturally engaged... but cannot easily be identified as either middle or working class (Savage 2013 p.240).

The idea of a grouping sitting between classes is appealing, but trying to classify further education is complicated by the variety of provision that includes academic and vocational teaching which may cross social divisions.

Any sociologically based group definition of a whole workforce will be further complicated when the intergenerational influence of embodied class and intersectionality elements such as gender, ethnicity and cultural heritage are introduced (Crenshaw 1989). However, whether or not further education professionals can be regarded as a class fraction and if so where that fraction sits must be considered. The term class fraction is based on a Bourdieusian conceptualisation (Bourdieu 2010) that links closely to his theories of field and habitus. Bourdieu's theory builds on Marx and Weber (Roueff 2024) to offer a multidimensional schema of stratification within the wider tripartite class groupings. Bourdieu separated primary, secondary and higher education teachers as class fractions of the petite bourgeoisie based on his observations of these professions' reliance on cultural capital for status; with primary teachers rating below the other fractions (Bourdieu 1984). He did not include further education teachers but he states that separate class fractions are:

defined by different asset structures i.e. different distributions of their total capital among the different kinds of capital' (Bourdieu 2010 p.109).

Using Bourdieu's definition, if further education teachers are to be regarded as a class fraction, how their capital is structured should be different to other types of teaching. Their financial capital through salary has already been established as

being beneath that of school and HE teachers. For this thesis, the literature and primary data will be used to question whether the structure and distribution of capital in further education teaching is something separate.

For Bourdieu a class fraction represents a distinct social space beyond a simple economic sub-grouping. Bourdieu (2010) used the term to theorise a 'symbolic struggle' for position or status. He suggests that the examination of nuances of class fractions such as questions of legitimacy can be used to question the limits of groups and how they struggle for position (Bourdieu 2010 p.256). Using this idea, my deployment of the term is concerned with the Veteran further education practitioners' position within social and educational space and to what extent veteran-ness is a struggle for position and recognition of value within further education or perhaps their struggle against that position.

I am not however, rejecting the more quantitatively based view of class fraction based on statistical modelling. Categories of economic capital and educational levels also need to be acknowledged, as they were by Bourdieu. In Chapter 2, I identified a division caused by the lower wages of further education teachers when compared with other educational sectors (see 2.8) that would suggest the Veterans group could be categorised as a class fraction using this more traditional view.

However, a question remains over whether their shared elements such as occupation and broad salary band are sufficient to produce similarities of disposition that might classify them as a class fraction in a Bourdieusian sense.

The question of class fraction is explored further in 3.4 professional identity.

### 3.2.9 Identity

My use of 'identity' is closely linked to Bourdieu's concept of disposition and thus is also inexorably intertwined particularly with habitus but also capital and field as the environment where disposition is created and expressed. According to Bourdieu, disposition and habitus are:

a socially constituted system of cognitive and motivating structures, and the socially structured situation in which the agents' interests are defined, and with them the objective functions and subjective motivations of their practices (Bourdieu 1977 p.176/7).

Therefore the cognitive and motivational structures are the disposition (individual) and they are influenced by the practices and habits of the context they are in. It is in the subjective motivations of the practices of the Veterans that I locate their identity.

However, 'identity' is used in my thesis as analogous to a 'subject position' rather than character, in that people 'make sense of who they are by locating themselves within culturally circulating discourses and narratives' (Guilfoyle 2015 p.1). I aim to use a socio-cultural perspective that defines identity within the influences of culture in UK society including all of the intersectional aspects of cultural heritage such as class, ethnicity, faith, community structures and individual concerns that will create a personal identity (Crenshaw 1989).

For this thesis, my interest lies in how the identities or dispositions of the Veterans have evolved and have been shaped by the workplace cultures that they have been part of. My working definition of a professional identity is a personal subject position that has evolved through training and experience (McNeil-Young *et al* 2021) within the 'social space' (Bourdieu 1987 p.2) of a professional field but

intertwines to a greater or a lesser extent with a person's character, cultural heritage and biographical history. Using the concept of an evolved identity implies a continuous process of change throughout a person's career rather than a condition that is arrived at and is then fixed. Identity is explored in relation to the participants in 3.5.

### 3.2.10 Professionalism

I will be exploring the concept of professionalism (see 3.4) in relation to the professional identities of my participants. I must, however, start by recognising that the term is a problematic and contested one in further education.

James (2017 p.109) highlights one of the issues in defining professionalism in further education, in that the 'commonly and historically understood' shared aspects of a recognisable professionalism such as 'specialist training' and 'occupational knowledge' are sometimes absent for further education teachers due, in part, to the ebb and flow of policy and legislation (discussed in Chapter 2) around the regulation and deregulation of further education teaching. This churn has undoubtedly contributed to the obfuscation of a clear understanding of further education professionalism.

In turn, the absence of a coherent objective model of what a further education professional is intended to be, has produced a discourse that appears to be permanently stuck in a condition that Tummons (2014 p.11) defined as 'immature', 'emergent and developmental' whilst Johnson & Johnson (2024 p.11) still saw it as 'dysfunctional'. The similarity over the period of 10 years is striking and suggests that little progress towards cohesion has been made.

The diversity of further education is cited as presenting unique and permanent practical barriers to a cohesive understanding of professionalism. Lingfield (2012) reported that although there was a basic essence of a professional identity, 'A consistent sense of professionalism among all FE lecturers might always prove elusive, given the diversity and scale of the sector' (2012 p.21). Johnson & Johnson (2024) concur that further education professionalism is complicated by the 'fragmented nature of the FE Sector' (Johnson & Johnson 2024 p.11). The contention here appears to be that professionalism for a vocational teacher is different to a community or other teacher. The argument that professionalism should be 'elusive' because further education teachers may work outside a classroom or have differing subject specialisms appears weak when weighed against the multiple elements of professionalism shared by all educators.

The dysfunction or 'mystery' (Johnson & Johnson 2024 p.11) of the seemingly perpetual flux in the discourse of further education professionalism is perhaps better explained by the rise of, and resistance to, neoliberalism in further education. Gleeson *et al* (2005) analysed the rise of the influence of neoliberalism on concepts of professionalism in further education with concern over the intensification of managerialism. This theme of tension recurs and is expanded by Atkins and Tummons (2017) who further define the ideologies competing for dominance. These competing discourses around professionalism emerge as the primary driver of contention will therefore form the basis of the examination that is taken forward into the body of the literature review, particularly in 3.4 and 3.5 where I will examine differing perspectives and what that may mean for veteran-ness in more detail.

### 3.2.11 Field

Bourdieu's concept of 'field' may also be useful to examine further education and the Veterans' working lives. I will discuss further in 3.3.1 the problems of applying this term to further education, but firstly I wish to establish the parameters of usage. Bourdieu described a 'field' as a defined social space that has its own 'properties' or rules (Bourdieu 1984 p.724). In Bourdieusian terms, 'field' interlinks with theories of habitus, disposition and what counts as capital in that field.

Within an autonomous field, elites are generated who

legitimate interpretation of practices and representations in specific areas of activity. These elites rationalize an implicit system of schemes of action, systematizing it in the form of explicit norms (Hilgers and Mangez 2014 p.7).

Bourdieu claimed that the acceptance of such 'functional and structural homology' (Bourdieu 2010 p.229) of the logic within a field allows the field to orchestrate itself in defining what is possible or impossible, acceptable or unacceptable. Once set, the field has its own rules and internal logic which creates a distinct habitus, in this case a workplace habitus, which the members of the group or 'agents' absorb. The group of agents adjust to the conditions of expected behaviours and language but also to its situated morality and aesthetics (Bourdieu 2010 p.243).

However, fields are not static either within themselves or within wider social stratification. Bourdieu uses the example of the medical field to show how class fractions emerge and struggle to position themselves as distinct fields. He gives as an example:

conflicts over the qualifications and legitimate scope of practice between doctors, anaesthetists, physios, midwives... (each of these universes itself functioning as a field of struggles) (Bourdieu 2010 p.242).

This illustrates how each group has to define their position in relation to the other groups and control their specificity to claim their distinction. How this concept relates to further education will be explored below. How it relates to veteran-ness will be a specific focus in the research.

### 3.3 Positioning further education within UK society

Seeing further education as a social 'field' (Bourdieu 1985) has the potential to be useful in starting to establish a working position for the sector within UK society that will inform my later analysis of the research data. However, there are issues in defining further education as a field. Whether further education can be regarded as a 'field' in itself, as a sub-field of education or whether it is too diverse in character to be a field at all is questionable. In Chapter 2 Context, I discussed the problem of naming further education as a unitary sector and recognised the opinion that further education is an 'abstract' amalgamation of provision put together for the convenience of government control (Smith 2017 p.858). The same problem presents itself in trying to apply Bourdieu's (1984) field theory to studying further education.

#### 3.3.1 Further education as a 'field'

In Chapter 2 Context, I established some of the more overt properties of further education such as the inconsistency of funding and constant changes of policy that differentiate further education from other phases of education. Therefore, I have to question whether these conditions allow for the level of autonomy of operation that

would be expected of a field in Bourdieusian terms. The lack of autonomy suggests a weakness of field properties. Whether the weakness of field properties is problematic for further education and the Veterans themselves, is a pertinent question for this study which will be discussed in more detail later. However, it is perhaps the consistency of the inconsistency that I can use to define further education as a field. Weak boundaries, constant change and a lack of autonomy is an observable, if problematic rule of this field. This may however, mean that the field is largely defined by the way it is conceptualised by policy-makers.

The particular properties or social practices that could define further education as a social space are also difficult to identify or use to define it as a field separate to other phases of education. For example, it is difficult to see the differences in social space between a school sixth form and a college that includes A-level provision or whether workplace training of apprentices constitutes the same social space as a GFE college providing apprenticeship training. When considering the work of my Veteran further education practitioners, it must be questioned whether I can regard them as working in a specified and unique 'field' with its own characteristics or whether I am adopting an unstable category.

Helpfully, Bathmaker's (2015) discussion of field 'boundaries' presents a less rigid vision of Bourdieu's (1985) concept of 'field' allowing it to be used without becoming overly entangled in classification. Her examination of the often 'porous boundaries' (Bathmaker 2015 p.68) between the fields of higher and further education in the delivery of HE in FE suggests that further education's ill-defined boundaries can be a fertile area for using 'field' theory. She concludes that, 'Hybrid forms might involve increasingly 'flaky' or porous boundaries' between different fields (Bathmaker 2015 p.68). Using a vision of further education as a field with

‘porous boundaries’ allows for the diversity of provision types within a singular field without expecting homogeneity.

Examining the boundaries of further education through the experiences of the participants may give an insight into whether Bourdieu’s concept of ‘doxa’ or ‘doxic relations’ (Bourdieu 1977 p.168) can still be applied to studying further education.

‘Doxa’ or the unspoken, accepted values, practices and beliefs that define a field (Grenfell 2008) are central to the concept of ‘field’ as a social space. The question of whether there are specific doxic beliefs or practices that characterise further education as a field or whether the diversity of provision is too great to produce such commonalities has not yet been fully answered by the existing literature. My study presents an opportunity to find possible answers to that question. In examining the longevity of my participants in further education I will be searching for commonalities of ‘doxa’ or underlying, unspoken beliefs to discover if there is anything quintessentially orthodox or unquestioned assumptions and beliefs that shape how individuals perceive their work within further education.

Field theory also suggests that ‘agents’ can be positioned within the ‘field’ based on the accrual of different types of capital. The more obvious economic capital can be used alongside cultural capital in placing an agent in hierarchical relationships within a field (Bourdieu 1984, 1988). Cultural capital or ‘familiarity with legitimate culture’ (Bourdieu 2010 p.84) and what is considered legitimate or of value may be ubiquitous across the field of further education or show more nuanced localisation suggesting there is no unified field. How cultural capital translates into symbolic capital or ‘manifestations of social recognition’ (Bourdieu 2000 p.241) will also be useful for positioning both further education within the wider field of education but also for considering my participants as agents within further education.

I will return to the positioning of practitioners of further education later in this chapter but first, I would like to consider Bourdieu's field theory (Bourdieu 1984, 1988) in relation to further education's position in UK society. The economically subordinate position of further education in relation to higher education, in terms of funding, lower levels of pay and the socio-economic backgrounds of learners, has been established. However, there are also underlying influences on further education that may suggest characteristics of an identifiable field. For example, further education is not unique within the educational sphere in experiencing the pressures of neoliberalisation but how it has influenced the sector is quite specific and requires further examination.

### 3.3.2 Neoliberalism and further education

In 3.2.3 the tenets of neoliberalism were set out. Here, I will examine neoliberalism further to focus on how this may have impacted on the working environment of the Veterans and on the Veterans themselves.

Scholars such as Biesta (2009) and Ball (2012, 2016, 2020) have detailed the rise of neoliberalisation in the education sector as a whole. Ball (2016) describes how

the three 'technologies' of Market, Management and Performance have inconspicuously but harmfully changed the subjective experience of education at all levels (2016 p.1046).

Colleges became a market of competing businesses via the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 which allowed the development of the other technologies of neoliberalism. Although other areas of further education such as ITPs and community learning were not so affected by the 1992 Act, the associated rise of accountability and standardised performance measurement expanded into all

areas of the sector through Ofsted inspections. Managerialism, accountability and performance management are interlinked techniques for the best way of following the market (Randle & Brady 1997). Managerialism justifies centralising decision making and standardising actions as efficiency (Enteman 1993, Lumby & Tomlinson 2006).

The managerialist standardisation of performance as a technology of neoliberalism can be connected with the Ofsted regimes of performance management established in the Context chapter. Ofsted as a market regulator measures how well further education institutions meet the inspection framework of the time and comply with government policy (Ofsted 2025). Biesta (2009) goes further, seeing performance monitoring as more than a simple chain of hierarchical pressure. He argues that such neoliberal devices as constant measurement can come to drive policy and that measurement can become a self-perpetuating aim,

we now live in an age in which discussions about education are dominated by measurement and comparisons of educational outcomes and that these measurements as such seem to direct much of educational policy and, through this, also much of educational practice. The danger here is that we end up valuing what is measured, rather than that we engage in measurement of what we value (Biesta 2009 p.43).

Biesta sees a circular causation that measurement can fuel policy change towards meeting market goals without questioning if those goals are the correct ones.

The 'large N' Neoliberalism of 'state-facilitated market rule' (outlined in 3.2.3, Peck 2013 p.1) is evident in the market driven further education policy initiatives of all major political parties in the UK and successive governments of the past 20 years

(Avis 2007, Simmons 2010, Duckworth and Smith 2019). In 2010 Simmons observed that even governments who espouse social change through education continue to follow a neoliberal direction:

despite the rhetoric of social democracy, issues of social justice are placed as subservient to neo-liberal understandings of the economy; any tensions in this relationship are overlooked; the interests of labour and capital are conflated in an unproblematic fashion (Simmons 2010 p.7).

A decade later, Smith and Duckworth (2020 p.15) still concurred with the observation of a neoliberal underpinning logic behind the policy initiatives enacted by both New Labour and Conservative/Liberal Democrat administrations. Interestingly, there appears to be an incongruence between the seeming incoherence of the multiple further education policy initiatives seen in the Context chapter and the coherence of the neoliberal aims of the policies observed by scholars. For example, the short-lived 14-19 Vocational Diplomas introduced by the New Labour government in 2008 aimed to 'equip young people with the skills employers need' (Jones 2021 p.1) but these were discontinued by the incoming coalition government in 2010 before they had even been fully rolled out. Ten years later in 2020 the Conservative administration launched T Levels with the aim of creating a qualification that 'meets the needs of industry and prepares students for entry into skilled employment' (DfE 2023). Although the educational level and the targeted learners are different, the similarity in tone and aim are striking. Simmons (2010) highlights the manner in which the interests of the learners and the employers have been conflated in the advertising of T Levels, giving the impression that both parties are being equally well served. This pattern continues under the

2024 Labour administration as shown in this quote from the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper:

There is a disconnect between what individuals choose to study and the needs of the economy, which limits people's earning potential (DfE 2025a p.8).

The implication of the language suggests that directing the choice of the individual into what is best for the economy is also best for that individual, even if the individual does not agree. It might be said that channelling people, so young, into narrow vocational pathways that unconsciously instil a habitus and disposition to labour in an unquestioning way might be explained through reference to another Bourdieusian concept, that of symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1999). It can be concluded that both parties are not being served equally, the needs of employers dominate the needs of learners who are having their future choices limited.

The incohesive nature of policy change, that is ostensibly oriented towards a similar neoliberal goal shows that what is best for the economy is not static or always agreed. It might be asserted that enacting policies that follow market trends coupled with a lack of understanding of the breadth of further education in government have caused instability in the further education environment. UK governments' 'narrow and prescriptive' understanding of further education's contribution to society 'based upon particular interpretations of skill and employability' (Simmons 2010 p.4) put further education in a prime position for criticism when governments fail to meet their economic aims. Esmond & Atkins (2020 p.9) are critical of the way that, 'UK government policies have sought in

particular to address needs for skilled workers', leaving those who do not fit into the targeted areas marginalised.

Even within this narrow interpretation of specifically valued skills, Avis (2018) notes how rhetoric around skills and the needs of the market changes between administrations and therefore changes what governments require from further education:

There was a time when experts argued the English labour force was under-skilled and in need of up-skilling. Currently the rhetoric is that people have developed the wrong skills which is reflected in the notion of a skills gap (Avis 2018 p.182).

From this we can conclude that any national economic shortcomings prompt repeated governmental interventions intended to flex the economy towards feared gaps in industrial skills that might limit future competition with other nations.

Again, the pattern continues in 2025 with governmental fears around rates of economic inactivity limiting growth, prompting statements such as 'too many people lack the skills to get into work and to get on at work' (DfE 2025a p.4). The 'wrong skills' (Avis 2018 p.182) are evidently still a concern that needs to be addressed through further policy change. Policy churn in further education can therefore be seen as being driven by fear in governments looking for potential quick and easy solutions to economic problems.

There appears to be a lack of any political vision that does not rely on a market-led model of further education. Avis, (2021) argues that neoliberalism has become so ubiquitous that it has become a functional ontology that has extinguished any alternative ideology. He sees it as a stagnation of thought. He writes:

the hegemonic position of neo-liberalism is not predicated on a ready acceptance of its tenets but rather based on a perception that there is no viable alternative (Avis 2021 p.160).

Ball (2020) agrees that neoliberalism involves the 'depoliticization of the political' (Ball 2020 p.1) which encapsulates the policy initiatives for further education of successive governments of differing political positions who have chaotically tasked further education to be purely reactive instead of attempting to mould the future.

Orr (2020) points out the contradictions in the free market doctrine when applied to further education. He contends that the neoliberal attempt to offer colleges the freedom of the market to compete and prosper whilst keeping tight control over the annual funding cycle and regulation coupled with frequent policy reform was inevitably going to end in failure. The 2022 (effective 2024 - DfE 2022) return of further education to centralised financial control would appear to be an acknowledgment that marketisation has failed and yet the techniques of using funding and the regulatory gaze to pilot further education in the interests of capital not only remain but seem to be increasing.

For example, on an institutional level, the directive to position business as the customer of further education can be seen in the directional changes in measurement judgements for colleges which are additional to the judgements used for schools by Ofsted. The Skills Act (2022) cemented into law a responsibility for further education providers to react to employers' demands, with its mandate for providers to 'co-operate with the employer representative body for that area' (Skills Act 2022 p.3) and base their curriculum on the Local Skills Improvement Plan. Policy here appears to be driven by an acceptance of neoliberal ideas of the

supremacy of the market, employers' interests and the need to measure adherence to that creed. The enactment of the policy tasks Ofsted to monitor, surveil and measure how closely further education colleges follow this remit (Ofsted 2022).

At an observable level, Biesta's (2009) assertion that we value what we measure is shown in the reaction of the Principal of a UK college in a statement on their website celebrating their 'strong' grading by Ofsted on the sub-judgement on their alignment with their Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIPs):

We're extremely grateful for the contributions of employers and strategic partners who have worked closely with us to develop our curriculum, ensuring that our students are equipped with the skills they need for their future careers (Principal of West Herts College 2024).

This statement celebrates the college's alleged ability to be reactive to the latest demands of the job market but even in this there is a simplistic conflation of intention in the provision of curriculum and the actual achievement of the learners which gives evidence of the performativity of the measurement criterion. This correlates with Biesta's (2009) assertion that measurement drives practice, at least at an institutional level. In this example, policy clearly drives measurement and measurement drives practice.

Additionally, Wheelahan and Moodie (2024) give a cautionary critique of the decision to position employers as the arbiters of the direction of further education. They point out that the neoliberal positioning of employers as the 'customer' (2024 p.36) of further education places enormous trust in market economics to direct the supply and demand of learners for industry when the 'equilibrium' can be disrupted by any crisis or failure of the market. The colleges are positioned reductively as a

conduit to facilitate supply meeting demand leaving them always behind where government want them to be.

For the individual further education practitioner, the extension of managerialism may be the manner by which the rise of neoliberalism is most felt. Olssen and Peters (2005) observed the changes to the authoritative structures of educational institutions under the influence of neoliberal control techniques. They are writing about higher education but further education can be said to mirror the same process. They contend that the gradual changes ‘transform the academic’s role’ (Olssen and Peters 2005 p.324) eroding autonomy and replacing it with chains of hierarchy. Olssen (2022) argues that the progression of neoliberalism has left the academic autonomy of the individual as a relic of a pre-neoliberal age. Although gradual, these changes can be seen to be deliberate and part of the overall dominance of market logic (Randle & Brady 1997, Lumby & Tomlinson 2000). Enteman (1993) in outlining the precepts of managerialism states that the intention is to disempower and devalue the individual to promote standardised efficiency. In an efficient institution ‘any individual is dispensable and replaceable by another’ (Enteman 1993 p.34).

An example of the transformation of the academic’s role can be seen in the principal’s statement above, in which the autonomy of further education practitioners to create the curriculum has been narrowed and ceded to local business leaders and strategic partners. The gratitude expressed by the Principal also points to the changed position of the academic and the disparity of power in the relationship between educators and business. The college is in the subordinate position of having to entreat local business leaders to spare their expensive time to offer curriculum advice. The professional autonomy, knowledge and judgement of

the college and its academics to make curriculum decisions has been devalued. It is a small logical step from casting further educational practitioners' professional knowledge as secondary to business, to the de-professionalisation of teachers (Pearce n.d., Johnston & Johnston 2024) into the role of industrial trainers that require no pedagogical expertise (this topic will be discussed further in 3.4.4).

The position of the individual further education practitioner in relation to the basic precepts of neoliberal thinking is ambiguous. They are pressed to see employers as the 'customer' but learners are also cast in that role by the rise in the discourse of choice and the proliferation of student voice satisfaction measurements (Randall & Brady 1997, Ball 2020). The role to be occupied by teachers is therefore somewhat unclear. Several writers draw on Stuart-Mill's (1836) original concept of *homo economicus* to explain that within a neoliberal conception an individual should be self-interested:

Individuals, it is claimed, function best and are able to contribute most effectively – both to their own welfare and to the economy in general – when they are allowed to follow their private interests (Simmons 2010 p.369).

Learners can easily be cast in the role of customers who follow self-interest, although the flaw in this construct is shown in the quote above where learners choose courses that do not maximize their 'earning potential' (DfE 2025a p.8). It is more difficult to cast further education teachers as *homo economicus* or to interpret what their economic self-interest might be in teaching. From the perspective of the neoliberalised further education sector as a whole, the teachers can be seen as simply the machinery whereby the product is produced. For further education practitioners who lie outside a narrow neoliberal short-term economic focus on skills for industry such as community learning (Wheelahan and Moodie 2024), the

concepts of *homo economicus* or even the analogy of machinery entirely fails, leaving a significant portion of the sector's work outside the paradigm and essentially deemed unimportant.

In Ball's interpretation, the position of teachers within the neoliberal paradigm is to be 'malleable rather than committed, flexible rather than principled – essentially depthless' (Ball 2012 p.31). Bauman (2007) suggests ways in which people can be manipulated to become that malleable, depthless piece of machinery that Ball (2012) believes that a neoliberalised education environment requires. Bauman believes that maintaining unstable working environments are is a key method of manipulation. He writes that for a marketized social system to proliferate it relies on the 'behavioural motives for actors' or 'making the individuals wish to do what the system needs them to do' (2009 p.149). In his 2007 work '*Liquid Times*' Bauman predicts that a neoliberal global system will increasingly produce working conditions characterised by jobs that are precarious in that they offer little promise of permanence and workers would be forced to flex and adapt to market conditions. He observes that such instability and uncertainty in working conditions cause increasing fear and anxiety around work, forcing people to constantly redefine their identities to keep up with employer demands. He concludes that instability motivates people to fight for their place in a shifting society, working harder and harder to maintain their position.

This observation has direct relevance to the participants in my study and how they have maintained their careers. The Context chapter showed a remarkably similar picture of a further education sector destabilised by unpredictable fluctuations of funding and policy governance that corresponds well with Bauman's (2007) predictions. Furthermore, Avis (2021) points out that in a neoliberalised system any

crisis will impact more on those who are already vulnerable in the workforce, such as people already working on insecure contracts, as well as groups of particular interest to my study such as older people and women. In the timescale of my research, events such as the 2008 economic crisis and subsequent financial austerity measures that in the Context chapter were shown to disproportionately impact funding in further education may be important milestones. Bauman (2007) with a global perspective and Avis (2021) with a UK focus, both indicate that precarity in employment conditions may well be issues that have featured in the working lives of my participants. How the Veterans have withstood these elements and how it has influenced them is an element of enquiry for research.

Ostensibly, the reading above suggests that my participants, who have had 20 years or more enduring such conditions, should be moulded by and submerged in a neoliberal habitus like depthless drones. It would be problematic to reduce any group of people to such a stereotype and there is a body of literature which gives an alternative view. Many scholarly observers of UK further education have contributed their thoughts to titles such as '*Further Education and the Twelve Dancing Princesses*' (2015), '*The Principal: Power and Professionalism in FE*' (2017), '*Identity and resistance in further education*' (2018), '*Caliban's Dance: FE after The Tempest*' (2020) that portray further education teachers as driven by learner-centred values. These titles (and others) suggest that neoliberalisation has not been 'total'. As a project it is ongoing, it has not (yet) succeeded in enforcing an all-pervasive culture change, although at the institutional level it has clearly made significant gains. A tension between these different dispositions (in the Bourdieusian sense) is still evident. This suggests that the Veterans' accounts may provide insights into how this tension is experienced over a long period.

Within my research, the question of the hegemony of neoliberal attitudes and actions can be examined through the perspective of the further education practitioners and whether they accept the idea that they are part of a marketplace producing the labour required by employers. However, neoliberalism's ubiquity and the absence of an explicit ideology, makes it difficult to define or observe in the beliefs, attitudes or behaviours of individuals.

### 3.3.3 The mask of meritocracy

Meritocracy can be considered an underlying belief that people 'whatever their start in life' can 'rise as far as their efforts and talent would take them' (Sandel 2021 p.24). This ideal stands in contrast to Bourdieu's analysis of the way middle-class children who can access the dominant culture are advantaged. Littler (2018) contends that the idea of meritocracy is, 'one of the prevalent social and cultural tropes of our time' (Littler 2018 p.16) explaining that the popular idea of meritocracy is an inherently oppressive concept used to explain and excuse the advantage of already advantaged groups.

Only 28% of the British public believe that the education system is unfair to marginalised groups (Duffy *et al* 2021 p.28). Research into public perceptions of inequality by King's College London used large scale quantitative methods to survey pre-selected groups based on a range of features such as political affiliations, age groups, race and previous education. They posited the statement, 'Overall, everyone in Britain has a fair chance of achieving the level of education they seek' (Duffy *et al* 2021 p.28) with responses given on an 11-point Likert scale. 41% of people gave non-committal or unsure responses around the middle of the scale with a further 31% of people agreeing that education gives everyone a fair chance (*ibid.*)

The 41% who were not sure are perhaps the most significant, suggesting that people have either not considered whether education is fair, or they do not have sufficient information to answer the question. This supports the conclusion that the equity of the education system is a veiled arena, for the general public at least.

Bourdieu has theorised the discriminatory nature of educational disadvantage but the belief that educational success is based purely on the merit of inherent intelligence and hard work persists in the public imagination, including in people who have not been successful. A belief in meritocracy, in the popular sense that everyone has an equal chance, could then be interpreted as a form of Bourdieu's symbolic violence. Applying Bourdieu, it could be said that 72% of the British public are misrecognising how inherited and conditioned advantage smooths the way to success for some people, naturalising social hierarchies into repeated generations. Those who experienced problems in education are accepting their lack of progression as emanating from personal deficit.

Writers on race such as Richards (2023) and Wallace (2023) have used Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital to unpick how an assumption of meritocracy can mask unfairness in education by applying a doxa of deficit. Meritocratic beliefs about education leave all those who do not progress smoothly through school to university as being deficient in some way either in intelligence or effort.

#### 3.3.4 Further education as a mechanism of class reproduction

It can then be argued that the subordinate position of further education operates as a mechanism of class reproduction. Bourdieu analysed the role of education in the perpetual reproduction of class advantage (1973, 1977). He traced the

mechanisms whereby middle-class dispositions of language and taste find comfort in the middle-class school environment, smoothing the way to academic success:

The educational system demands of everyone alike that they have what it does not give. This consists mainly of linguistic and cultural competence and that relationship of familiarity with culture which can only be produced by family upbringing when it transmits the dominant culture (Bourdieu 1973 p.80).

Bourdieu's argument here is that what is being measured in education is not any innate ability but rather how well a person adheres to what has been normalised as legitimate knowledge (Giroux 2020). For him, schools operate as a mechanism of imposing 'meanings and values' of the 'dominant society' to economically and politically recreate those legitimatised cultural hierarchies (Giroux 2020 p.65). Those who do not adhere to the dominant model of culture may find themselves labelled as lacking the valued academic abilities and channelled towards the less prestigious route of vocational education and training.

Thompson (2019) asserts that the subordinate position of vocational education functions as part of the way UK society reproduces social disadvantage.

The academic-vocational distinction therefore operates as a mechanism for the reproduction of social inequality in which students are allocated to vocational tracks according to class background rather than on the basis of ability or aptitude. In this sense, vocational education is a part of the 'making' of class, through which young people are differentiated into qualitatively distinct and hierarchically ordered groups (Thompson 2019 p.74).

Thompson's perspective draws on the Bourdieusian theory of cultural reproduction through education but posits UK further education as an additional structural mechanism of the reproduction of class structure. Thompson locates the subordinate position of further education as a labelling function that funnels people into subordinate societal positions.

Thompson's mechanistic interpretation of further education's role, given in the quote above, can be seen as reductive in removing any recognition of personal agency or geographical differences in educational experience. Similarly, Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction (1977) has often been seen as overly deterministic (Jenkins 1982; Susen 2013, for example) in ignoring the agency of individuals to change the course of their lives.

Further education can also be seen as an opportunity to redress the injustice of education. The Marxist visionary, Freire wrote,

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world (Freire, 2000, p.34).

The young people and adults who enter further education are sometimes people who have not integrated into the system as it stands and reject the logic that has been offered to them at school. I add the codicil here that there are also many further education learners that have done well at school but for those who have not, further education can offer a conduit to change their place in society and

indeed to change society (this will be discussed further in the context of teacher motivation in 3.4.6).

However, whilst I would want to recognise the ability of the individual to improve their social and economic positions and further education's role in helping them to do that, the stark fact of around 50% (Lisanskaute, Sutton Trust 2021) of further education learners fitting into the deprived category appears to support a theory of the reproduction of class structure through education. The school phase of education has labelled these learners as non-academic and passed them onto further education to fit them for vocational training. Destination statistics for the UK for 2022/23 show that a disproportionate number of 16-18 year olds, who are continuing to study at level 2, continue at colleges rather than school which further stratifies their outcomes. Only 64% of level 2 learners go into a 'sustained' destination of additional education or apprenticeship training (compared to 87% at Level 3) (this is a 2022/23 statistic (Education Statistics Service 2025). The other 36% having chosen to exit education and training having attained the equivalent of GCSE, qualifying them for unskilled low paid occupations.

It can then be contended that further education is both classed and classing. Such a perspective does not mean that some individuals do not experience further education as transformative but structurally and in policy terms it is a route designated for working class people.

### 3.3.5 The academic/vocational divide and the othering of further education as symbolic violence

The academic vocational divide that has characterised the field of UK education finds its roots in the cartesian dualism of body and mind (Calef 2023). Within this conception, higher education can be cast as intellectual and therefore more

desirable, whilst further education, particularly when viewed through the lens of neoliberal policy-making, is associated with manual work and becomes the lesser, undesirable part of the dualism, being assigned a subordinate position (Thompson 2019).

It is a short step from seeing further education as a less desirable route to designating it as 'other' in relation to higher education. The theory of 'othering' in creating 'in' groups and 'out' groups can be traced back to the 18<sup>th</sup> Century (Doubkova 2024). In modern times it has been used by Foucault to elucidate the marginalisation of prisoners (1977) and homosexuals (1978), the theory has also been espoused by contemporary feminist thinkers. hooks argues that othering underpins stereotyping, prejudice, marginalisation and exploitation in today's society:

'the Other can be continually exploited, and... such exploitation will occur in a manner that reinscribes and maintains the status quo (hooks 1992 p.368).

The subordinate position created by 'othering' then becomes a justification for the marginalisation of further education and the exploitation of learners as human capital in the service of industry. For example, in relation to further education, the surprising phrase, 'other people's children' comes up in newspaper articles and popular books (e.g. Lenon 2017). By 2000, the term appears to be in common usage as shown in a Guardian opinion piece by a college principal.

A ghostly acronym haunts further education: OPC, Other People's Children, Plato's bronze and iron races, apt for brazen, iron-hearted educational eugenics, while the children of rulers, of the rich, of the opinion formers, guzzle on the gold standard of A/S (Rospigliosi 2000).

The use of this acronym suggests it had common usage and the emotive tone of the article is an indication of the anger generated by the perceived disparity that it describes.

A picture starts to emerge of further education being cast in the position of being 'other' or outside the norm by policy makers and government. Kirkup (2021) argues that the popular media tend to ignore further education because of the dominance of university graduates in journalism and public life. It can be argued that it is from the position of dominance and lack of understanding that the discourse of 'other' around further education is created and perpetuated.

### 3.3.6 Further education as symbolic violence

It is therefore possible to see further education as both the product of and the perpetrator in the reproduction of class-based disadvantage. Further education both suffers and dispenses symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1999) in that a doxic assumption that positions further education in a subordinate social space, can be seen as the product of a social hierarchy that requires some to be disadvantaged so others can be advantaged. Society sees further education as lacking prestige and 'misrecognises' (Webb 2002) its subordinate position as 'natural' rather than an arbitrary construct. Within this logic, society accepts the symbolic violence of governmental denial of resources and constant policy meddling that damages part of society's own education system because it seems familiar and natural.

However, it can also be argued that further education trains people to expect and accept that disadvantaged position and can therefore be interpreted in Bourdieu's terms as a form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1999) in and of itself. Further education learners tacitly and unconsciously submit to the harm done to them

through labelling and the limiting of their social mobility because it seems 'natural' so passes unidentified as harm (Webb 2002).

The work of further education teachers could then be interpreted as an integral part of recreating disadvantage. The teachers' own practice can reinforce the problem through their 'pedagogic action' which 'constitutes symbolic violence because it entails the imposition of arbitrary meanings and cultural values on learners (Duckworth and Smith 2019 p.6). Unconsciously, the work of the Veterans may be inflicting 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu 1999) on their learners through imposing dominant cultural values. This links directly to the motivation of the Veterans and how they see their practice.

### 3.3.7 Further education as a working class institutional habitus

Using Bourdieu's theory of habitus (1973), it is possible to see the logic in learners' submission to the symbolic violence of further education's role in the reproduction of disadvantage for people from working class backgrounds. Bourdieu described habitus as 'socialised subjectivity' observing how 'the human mind is generically bounded' by 'collective and individual history' (Bourdieu 2000 p.211). Bourdieu's assertions that the environment in which we are socialised as children forms us is unsurprising. However, his use of habitus to show how the middle-class modes of language and cultural understandings used in school are discordant and alienating for working class children is revealing for thinking about the contrasting habitus of school in comparison to that of further education.

Reay's (2010) study of working class young people entering university used Bourdieu's theory to explore the concept of 'institutional habitus' questioning how the students fitted into universities that are characterised as a middle-class cultural

‘field’. She found that they experienced ‘discomforts generated when habitus confronts a starkly unfamiliar field’ (Reay *et al* 2010 p.120). Reay’s participants had to adapt and adopt different personas to fit in at university which draws a question about the institutional habitus of further education.

It can be inferred that further education teachers and institutions have the opportunity to offer learners from working class backgrounds a counterpoint to the potentially negative experiences of school and an alternative to the ‘discomforts’ of a culture clash (Reay *et al* 2010).

When habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it finds itself as a “fish in water”, it does not feel the weight of the water and takes the world about itself for granted (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992 p.127).

For learners from working class backgrounds, finding themselves within a further education environment that matches their own culture (if it does), may perhaps, offer a freedom of interaction which learners have hitherto lacked in their educational experiences.

### 3.4. Identity and veteran-ness in further education

In this section I am seeking to establish the possible influences on my participants in their subject position as Veteran further education teachers/practitioners.

#### 3.4.1 Individual habitus

Using Bourdieusian theory, the individual’s preconscious habitus is inevitably the foundation that any adult professional identity will have been built on. Bourdieu wrote:

the structures of the habitus which become in turn the basis of perception and appreciation of all subsequent experience (Bourdieu 1977 p.72).

This suggests the Veterans' own foundational socialisation will have had a fundamental influence on how they react to their work environment.

Individual class background, as part of habitus may have bearing on how the work environment is experienced. Bourdieu (2010) positions teaching as a middle-class profession and although further education teaching may not carry the same status as school teaching (see 3.2.8), it may still represent a new social position for the participants. The emphasis on vocational skills may draw teachers from traditionally working class occupations such as carpentry, bricklaying or hairdressing raising the potential of the discomfiting feeling of habitus clivé of not immediately understanding the unspoken rules of their new environment.

Bourdieu described his own experience of social mobility as being 'torn by contradiction and internal division' (Bourdieu 2000 p.16). He did however, believe that people could accommodate change to a point:

Dispositions are subject to a kind of permanent revision, but one which is never radical, because it works on the premiss established in the previous state (Bourdieu 2000 p.161).

This suggests that an ability to accommodate change is important to veteran-ness but how far people are able to adapt to new field rules is limited. Bourdieu reasoned that when the limit was reached disposition becomes 'dysfunctional' and efforts 'to perpetuate them help to plunge them deeper into failure' (*ibid.*).

Other writers such as Reay (2010, 2013a & b), Friedman (2016) and Ivemark (2021) have explored the discomfort experienced through social mobility and the way that people cope with feelings of not fitting in. I am interested in how people adjust to an institutional habitus that clashes with their own foundational habitus or if veteran-ness only occurs when a comfortable match is found.

However, class is just one aspect of habitus. Multiple contextual conditions will have had influence on their primary socialisation, some may be apparent from demographic information but others may be far more subtly psychological and beyond the scope of this study. Intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989) offers a useful reminder that when examining individual habitus there will be complex interplays of how disposition has been established. Hence, the participants in this study may sit in an identifiable category but individual characteristics will have a major role in how they experience that reality and how they establish their professional identity in response to those experiences.

#### 3.4.2 Identity and further education professionalism

Over the past 20 years of the Veterans' careers, further education professionalism has been a site of competing, sometimes contradictory, sometimes overlapping constructs. The proliferation of constructs can be said to be further evidence of the struggle to legitimate practice and create a definable professional identity.

Alternatively, it could be argued that the openness of the professionalism discourse projects a confusion that further detracts from any clear understanding of further education teaching as a profession.

Atkins and Tummons (2017) divide discourse on further education professionalism into three categories, managerialist, emancipatory and utilitarian (p.356). However, they caution against attaching the categories to a linear time trajectory or to specific governmental administrations. They point out (2017 p.6) that the Coalition government of 2010 introduced policies that embodied both managerialist elements of professional standards alongside utilitarian elements of deregulation.

Tully (2023) gives an indication of the practical importance of this somewhat esoteric struggle for a further education professional identity. He observes that the

lack of trust in the professionalism of the individual allows the badging of people as professional or unprofessional because they have adhered or failed to adhere to a 'preferred ideology' (Tully 2023 p.27). Tully's use of the term 'preferred ideologies' highlights how arbitrary constructs of professionalism may appear but also infers a dynamism. It can be expected that over the 20-year period of my Veterans' careers, constructs will have changed, at least subtly, so the idea of adherence or non-adherence to stipulated constructs of professionalism has particular relevance for my study. It also raises questions around how discourses of professionalism are generated, who or what body has the power to decide what is 'preferred'.

Tully (2023) suggests that 'those with the 'power to recognise' occupy a privileged space where preferred ideologies of what is 'true' and 'acceptable' prevail' (Tully 2023 p.27). The 'power to recognise' or badge professionalism in most teaching fields would initially suggest passing through a system of training and qualification. A model of professional behaviour, pre-approved by a government department, is taught, observed and then 'badged' as acceptable. However, as discussed in 2.10, compulsory teacher training has not been the norm for further education, creating flux around who or what body has the 'power to recognise' (Tully 2023).

Avis (2003) wrote on a similar subject at the beginning of my period of interest. Both Avis (2003) and Tully (2023) use Bourdieu to show the power dynamics that have continually sought to influence those working in further education over the last 20 years. Avis (2003) was writing prior to the introduction of compulsory teacher training for further education and Tully (2023) after its demise but both draw the focus back to the direct power of government as setting the discourse. Avis (2003) places the Learning and Skills Council (abolished in 2010) and the inspectorates as central in directing and enforcing the preferred constructs of professionalism at that

time. Avis is critical of the managerialism that measures and punishes those who do not match the government generated view of professionalism.

Tully's (2023) perspective has the benefit of having seen the brief experiment of compulsory teacher training. His view of where the power lies to set the discourse of professionalism in further education shows a change from Avis. Tully clearly regrets the 2013 (BIS 2012) removal of the need to train or gain a specific qualification and sees the move as ceding the power to recognise or decide what is professional to employers. Gleeson *et al's* (2015) observation that following the 2013 repeal of the requirement to train, vocational qualifications and experience have been considered more important by employers than teaching qualifications or experience supports Tully (2023).

Leaving the power to decide what is professional to employers, suggests localised 'utilitarian' (Atkins and Tummons 2017) understandings of professionalism that place pedagogy as secondary or even irrelevant to the 'passing-on' of technical skills. Atkins and Tummons (2017) argue that such utilitarian constructs 'de-skill' further education teachers leaving them reliant on institutional concerns and perhaps the teachers' existing vocational professional identity. Such isolation from the wider field of education then raises concerns such as understandings of professional ethics. The tension between the isolation of localised utilitarian concepts and the ubiquity of managerialist concepts begin to emerge. This suggests that further education teachers have a locally badged, low prestige status that is however subject to centrally policed performance measurement

Avis's earlier work (2003) cites issues of trust, particularly the trust in teachers to make their own decisions as an intrinsic part of professionalism. Avis argues that a lack of trust leads to managerialist constructs such as the over-generalisation of

‘what works’ pedagogic models ignoring teachers’ contextual knowledge and judgement (Avis 2003 p.327). Similarly, writers such as James (2017) and Tummons (2016) are critical of the managerialism of imposed ethical constructs such the ETF Professional Standards (2014, 2022).

### 3.4.3 Professional standards for further education

Since 2011, the Society for Education and Training and its sister organisation the Education and Training Foundation have had a dominant position within the discourse of further education professionalism and to set the ‘preferred ideology’ (Tully 2023).

These organisations offer a national forum for professional dialogue through their professional training, research and offers of professional formation (ETF and SET online). In addition, the Professional Standards (ETF 2014 and 2022) and concepts of Dual Professionalism (SET 2014) which emanate from these organisations are intended to give a benchmark for professional practice. They can be said to have the potential to legitimate further education teachers within the wider field of education. Their government backing gives them a public stage to make clear what further education professionalism looks like, delineating further education as a defined field (Bourdieu 2010).

However, the standards lack detailed specific guidance about what further education professionalism might look like. For example, Standard 1 stipulates that practitioners should, ‘Critically reflect on and evaluate your practices, values, and beliefs to improve learner outcomes’ (ETF 2022), suggesting that there should be some underpinning values but there is scant specific guidance on what should guide those values. Using Tully’s (2023) argument, the ETF’s ambiguity around

‘values’ leaves institutional employers as the arbiters of the ‘preferred ideology’ (Tully 2023).

In the ETF Professional Standards (2022) it is possible to see evidence of the overlap of managerialist and utilitarian elements (Atkins and Tummons 2017). These government/employer generated standards stipulate requirements for teachers to develop and maintain specified skills but there are no matching standards for institutions, meaning that individuals are entirely responsible for their own professionalism. At the same time, there is no regulatory requirement for the standards to be used by employers. If institutions choose to use them, it can be argued that the wording such as in Standard 1 quoted above, is vague enough to allow institutions to provide their own interpretation. Therefore, there is no standardisation of the standards leaving a technology of managerialism as utilitarian in application.

#### 3.4.4 Dual professionalism

The ‘preferred ideology’ (Tully 2023) of dual professionalism (SET 2014) has been described as

The best vocational teaching and learning is a sophisticated process; it demands ‘dual professionals’ – teachers and trainers with occupational expertise and experience, who can combine this with excellent teaching and learning practice [edge.co.uk n.d.].

The concept ostensibly gives equal weight to pedagogical knowledge and vocational knowledge. The usefulness of the individual practitioner to the employer is in continuing both sets of skills but the emphasis is again on the individual to meld and maintain these two sides of their professional identity.

The utilitarian focus of employers, pressurised by the inspection sub-judgement on 'meeting skills needs' (Ofsted 2024), centralises the vocational side of dual professionalism putting the onus on practitioners to maintain current industrial knowledge or have their professional capital gradually devalued. Bathmaker (2012 p.91) suggests that the neoliberalisation of further education and the influence of the Skills discourse, positions what is considered valuable knowledge for the field. The vocational knowledge of the teachers is what is of most value because of its immediate relationship to the development of learners as 'human capital' for industry (Duckworth and Smith 2018 p.3). In accepting the influence of the neoliberalised Skills discourse on what is of value in further education, it can be concluded that 'dual professionalism' (ETF 2014) is a concept weighted towards an economic and productivity agenda that positions teachers instrumentally, and as having vocational knowledge that has a shelf life.

For long-standing further education teachers, such as my participants, this may present a tension in their application of the 'preferred ideology' (Tully 2023) of dual professionalism (SET 2014). Trying to maintain a status of vocational expert over time may be difficult. For example, Beetlestone (2019) gives his own experience as a long-standing further education computing teacher. He writes from a practitioner perspective rather than a scholarly one but his experience of 'skills fade' (2019) and the fragility he feels regarding his vocational currency is clear. He writes, 'I have no idea what it's like working as a software developer in 2019-20' (Beetlestone 2019). He feels his legitimacy is gradually reducing the longer he is teaching. It is evident that for him, maintaining the vocational specialist identity is a struggle, producing feelings of insecurity or precarity around his employment. The participants in my study will be at least 20 years away from their original vocational

area so may have experienced similar struggles in maintaining their specialist identity but may have found ways of staying in their professional field. It will be interesting to explore their experiences of 'skills fade', whether it has produced precarity and if so, how that experience has influenced their professional identity.

Although Esmond's (2017) research is based on early career vocational teachers, his analysis (employing Archer 1995) of the morphogenetic manner by which any new identity is built on the structures and understandings of previous experiences, specifically vocational identity is useful. In his early career workshop teachers, he found that there is an 'endemic' tension between teacher identity and 'former professional' identity (Esmond 2017 p.6/7). Esmond believes the tension in the duality is because the teacher's identity is formed through the lens of the vocational identity:

possibilities of agency and acknowledging the continued significance of structure in spite of its diminution, was seen as appropriate to capturing the circumstances within which professionals make their choices about educational practice and teacher identity (Esmond 2017 p.15).

For these early career teachers, their vocational identity continued to dominate their decision-making. Esmond writes that this is 'in spite of (the) diminution' of structure. For my late career teacher participants, 'diminution' will have had a lot longer to influence and alter their once established, subject positions.

Echoing Esmond's work, Le Gallais' (2009) ethnographic study of further education teachers suggests that vocational identity remains dominant. Her 20 participants had been teaching for between three and 28 years so not all of them would be considered as a direct comparison to the long serving further education

professionals who will participate in this study. However, the evidence presented gives first hand insight into the many tensions that exist around professional identity for skills-based teachers. Her research shows that their vocational identities remained central to how they perceived themselves. She concludes that:

the majority of these vocational lecturers, despite in some cases over 20 years of teaching, did not feel comfortable about calling themselves 'lecturers' (Le Gallais 2009 p.39).

She quotes (2009 p.43) some of the participants explaining how they introduce themselves as a 'brickie' or a 'sparky' rather than a lecturer. She interprets this partly as pride in their vocational areas but also a reluctance to take on a middle-class persona that they do not feel they deserve. Le Gallais' 'whole life' perspective includes but goes beyond Esmond's (2017) emphasis on the vocational as a pre-existing habitus (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) that mediates the superimposition of teacher professionalism. Le Gallais' (2009) interpretation of class habitus as a key mediator may be a factor in the continued dominance of vocational identity over the teacher identity.

Whilst subject position or professional identity is inevitably individual and highly nuanced, these studies have shown that pre-existing subject positions are important in forming and maintaining a professional identity. However, I feel the struggle experienced by Beetlestone (2019) as a practitioner may add the emotional impact of precarity to the research findings of scholars who have found that, from practitioner perspectives, occupational professionalism takes precedent in a dual professional model (Bathmaker and Avis 2013, Esmond 2017).

Masquelier (2018) uses the idea of symbolic domination to suggest that precarity will form and alter habitus. He suggests that precarity becomes a dominant symbol that alters and moderates behaviours and perceptions. For the Veterans, this may suggest that the concept of symbolic domination may play an important role in the shifting dynamic of their identities and the balance of dual professionalism.

Whether non-vocational teachers that rely on academic skills such as English and maths are able to maintain a dual professional subject position is also in question. They may be able to more easily maintain the currency of their subject expertise for longer than a vocational teacher through professional development courses but it might be argued that they are already marginalised by the concept as their 'skills' are not central to the narrow discourse of skills for industry.

For those working in the specialist SEND sector, the 'preferred' construct of dual professionalism based on the discourse of vocational skills is particularly incongruent. In further education institutions where the curriculum is not designed around teaching specific subjects but rather personalised independence for learners, the skills of value are the teachers' knowledge of specific disabilities and how these may be mitigated (NATSPEC 2023). However, the Society for Education and Training excludes this version of knowledge by defining subject expertise as holding a qualification in the subject that they are teaching (SET 2023) leaving teachers in these institutions marginalised by the body who are supposed to provide recognition of professionalism.

#### 3.4.5 Moral involvement and connection

Bathmaker and Avis (2013 p.734-5) give a critical appraisal of organisational professionalism that they see as a 'discourse of control'. They hold that organisational professionalism can be used to control and exploit practitioners

through their 'moral involvement' and 'sense of service'. They see this type of professionalism as the worker sublimating their own values to that of an organisation which leads to performativity.

Bathmaker and Avis (2013) appear to view organisational values as being uniformly defined as performance-driven, which I would question. The vast breadth of organisations within further education would suggest that some organisations, community learning for example, would espouse missions outside the performative. Furthermore, a practitioner may select an organisation to work for because the values of that organisation match the teacher's own, rather than having complied with the parameters of professionalism dictated by the organisation. This would not then be a 'discourse of control' but rather a fulfilment the practitioners' 'sense of service' (p.734/5).

The idea that having a sense of service to an organisation is always exploitative is also questionable. However, the findings of Duckworth and Smith's (2019) study of further education in many ways mirror Bathmaker and Avis' (2013) assertion that having a moral or emotional commitment to an organisation can be linked to exploitative practices. Their quantitative data shows a pattern of respondents who were working in increasingly difficult conditions; 19% of respondents reported teaching more than 27 hours per week' (Duckworth and Smith 2019 p.23) and '40% thought that leadership only sometimes, rarely or never allowed them to meet students' needs' (p.41). The level of frustration with their institutions suggests that for these further education teachers, their sense of professionalism or loyalty is being exploited but the connection lies with the learners rather than the organisation *per se*. Duckworth and Smith's (2019) findings confirm and extend Bathmaker and Avis' (2013) suggestion that professional identity may be

established in connection to an institution, if the institution is seen as a proxy for the body of learners.

An organisation and the learners they serve, may play an important part in the professional identity of a teacher making them vulnerable to exploitative demands but this does not necessarily indicate control. Rather than passivity, practitioners might be facing dilemmas and making day to day choices about what is important. However, in these two sources, the tension between the drive to meet the needs of the learners and the pressure of performativity is established.

The experiences of further education practitioners in the COVID-19 pandemic gives further evidence of the sorts of tensions and choices to be made. In the 'Learning from Lockdown' (2020) report, Henderson draws on practitioner voices to understand what people working in further education felt were the most important things about their work in that incredibly difficult time. Henderson uses anonymised quotes to illustrate the point that caring for learners is the priority.

In our area, there is the risk of county lines and high levels of male suicide. When I asked our safeguarding lead how things were, she went, 'we've not lost one yet'. I thought, 'that's actually what it boils down to – not whether they are going to pass their assignments (Henderson 2020 p.12).

There is a sense of a professional commitment to both the geographical community and the particular needs of the learners within the organisation but the immediacy of learner welfare has become such an overwhelming concern that any other purpose in their work is eclipsed: the professional elements of teaching or performative organisational elements are secondary. This was a view in extreme

circumstances, but it notably correlates with the quote below from a practitioner given in normal circumstances from Duckworth and Smith (2019).

Our service... it's half social work and half teaching. I mean who would pick up the pieces if we weren't here...? Without us here? Mental health is massive, it's getting bigger. Social work. We find students places to live. We do all that wraparound service as well... (Colleges) tend to be community hubs (Duckworth and Smith 2019 p.43).

The sense of moral involvement and service is still at the forefront of the contributor's mind but here, the practitioner has established their own balance between the task they have been employed to perform and the moral imperative they feel towards learner care.

These practitioner-derived sources provide valuable insights into the immediacy of meeting learner needs for those working in further education and why practitioners persevere in their difficult task. The theme of meeting the basic needs of learners to provide the conditions for learning to take place emerged as a priority for the practitioners. A sense of service to a community, be it defined geographically, or as learner groups, also emerged. Notably, these priorities expressed by practitioners do not match with the instrumentalist priorities of the neoliberal agenda or government policy seen earlier in the chapter and do not support a conclusion of performativity or control attached to moral involvement (Bathmaker and Avis 2013).

When considering the subject position or professional identity of my Veterans, I must not assume that a sense of restorative practice (Duckworth and Smith 2019), community connection (Henderson 2020) or moral involvement (Bathmaker and Avis 2013) is a prerequisite to explain the loyalty that the Veterans have had to

their work. However, I am interested in examining elements of moral involvement through the primary data and exploring the tensions the Veterans have experienced. If the Veterans have achieved a balance in their own professional ethics, how have they achieved that balance? I am interested in the extent to which achieving a balance involves being exploited or acquiescing to performativity. Veteran-ness however, might also rely on or require a specific form of professional identity that is axiologically based. That is the focus of the following subsection.

#### 3.4.6 Emancipatory professional identity

For this thesis, understanding the participants' motivations to carry on teaching or working in further education is central to the research questions and an understanding of what constitutes veteran-ness. Having an emancipatory professional identity would locate their subject position as one embodying personal and perhaps politicised practice that suggests moving beyond the moral and emotional connection seen above (Bathmaker and Avis 2013). However, as mentioned in 3.2.5, there are gradations and nuances within scholarship on emancipatory education.

For example, Noddings' (2006) relational pedagogy rejects overt political aims to offer students emancipation through care, critical reflection and dialogue. For Noddings, the non-threatening relationship with the teacher is central. Her relational pedagogy displaces the demands of performative education to focus firstly on the emotional needs of students. This matches well with the concerns expressed in the previous section (Henderson 2020) and offers a useful step beyond Bathmaker and Avis' (2013) sense of service and 'moral involvement' to sit alongside Fulford *et al's* (2023) learner-focused nurturing ideal of educational

justice (discussed in 3.2.5) and transformative learning (Duckworth and Smith 2018) to be examined later in this section.

The absence of overt politicisation expressed by Noddings sits in juxtaposition to the 'revolutionary' action-focused perspective of critical pedagogy espoused by McLaren (e.g. in McLaren & Kumar 2012). McLaren centralises issues of class as the site of oppression that educators should address through their practice. hooks (2003 p.xv.) is similarly overtly politicised but focuses more closely on addressing the 'the voice of dominator hegemony' in education in reproducing racial and gender oppression. However, what unites proponents of critical pedagogy is the belief that an ideological struggle exists in the 'productive and deliberative nature of pedagogy' (Giroux 2020 p.4). In other words, education can either reproduce the stratified nature of an unfair society or teach learners to critically engage with their own oppression so that society is changed. Giroux positions teaching as 'a moral and political practice, as a struggle over assigned agencies and as a mode of organised resistance' (Giroux 2020 p.245). This suggests a binary choice, practitioners must select a position of either recreating the stratified nature of society through their practice (as discussed in 3.3.6) or challenging the Skills discourse of further education and the predestination of their learners into class-based vocations. In application to my thesis, it must be questioned if such a clear binary division is practical or sustainable over a career.

The difficulty for my research will be to ascertain when the Veterans' pedagogy becomes 'critical'. Giroux (2020) gives further explanation of how pedagogical practice becomes critical.

What critical pedagogy does insist upon is that education cannot be neutral.

It is inevitably a deliberate attempt to influence how and what knowledge,

values, desires, and identities are produced within particular sets of class and social relations (Giroux 2020 p.183).

The emphasis here is on the 'deliberate' nature of activity. He repeats this point throughout his writing, reiterating: 'Academics must deliberate, make decisions, take positions' (ibid. p.92) based on their aim of social justice. Giroux offers practical indicators of what critical pedagogy may look like, suggesting one indicator might be the choices about how teachers use the power that is intrinsic to their role as an educator. Nouri and Sajjadi's review of the principles of critical pedagogy concurs that practice must demonstrate:

a radical change in the power relationships in the classroom and suggests that teachers and students need to learn from each other (Nouri & Sajjadi 2014 p.9).

This reciprocal relationship shows similarity to Noddings (2006) relational pedagogy but in critical pedagogy, teachers' decisions about how they use their authority within the classroom are specifically aimed to empower learners to question their own societal position (Giroux 2020).

Further education would appear to be an ideal arena to apply Giroux's call for direct intervention and challenge to social marginalisation through classroom practice. Further education practitioners could be seen as having the opportunity to use their practice as a political act. However, within the context of the Veterans' subject position, over time it is hard to imagine that practising in an overtly political way would not have brought clashes with managerialist policy regimes that demand concentration on 'knowledge rich curriculums' (DfE, Gibb 2021). In such a highly surveilled, compliance-driven working environment (Randle & Brady 1997), this could be a difficult position to maintain for the 20 years I am setting as a

benchmark for veteran-ness. In addition, Giroux's image of critical pedagogy is based largely on schoolteachers and envisions changing the mind-sets of children rather than the older learners that my participants will engage with.

The contemporary work of Duckworth and Smith (2018, 2019) draws on Giroux (2020) and Mezirow (1991) but funnels the focus of critical pedagogy into a UK further education context. Duckworth and Smith's (2018, 2019) research draws findings directly from a large sample (n 350) of further education practitioners to offer a more practical way of seeing critical pedagogy in operation.

They use the term 'transformational teaching and learning' to recognise the changes that positive further education learning experiences has on people's lives. However, it is questionable whether their construct is entirely analogous with Giroux's critical pedagogy (2020). Both theorisations are open to a charge of being idealistic and politicised. For example, Noddings (2006 p.178) is cautionary around the risk of indoctrination that she believes can result from the abstract and 'dogmatic' application of critical pedagogy.

Although political conclusions are drawn regarding the further education system and the policy conditions that constrain it, pedagogical aspects are more focused on the difference that practitioners make to the lives of individuals. In similarity to Fulford *et al* (2023), the onus is not placed on the practitioners to spark large scale societal change through their teaching, rather to create changes that ripple out into society from changes to the individual learner.

Transformational teaching and learning perhaps offers a construct that can be coopted to create an image of an emancipatory professional identity. The image is one which is politically active in intent, in that it is underpinned by a desire for social justice but is also sustainable inasmuch as it can be practised whilst complying, or

at least appearing to comply, with institutional and sectoral policy demands.

Duckworth and Smith's research shows practices of interpersonal mutuality and restorative approaches that involve care of the whole person used as ways of guiding learners to see themselves as agentive in their own lives (Duckworth and Smith 2018, 2019). These approaches may not appear so overtly political (with a small p) but they can be seen to echo the essence of Freire's education as 'an act of freedom' in that they equip and enable learners to reclaim their full humanity (Freire 1970). Duckworth and Smith explain that:

transformative teaching and learning facilitates the subversion and rejection of negative labels by students and the re-working of learning identities to gain hope and pathways forward (2018 p.28).

Further education practitioners who actively work towards equipping learners to reimagine their lives could therefore be said to have adopted a position orientated towards achieving emancipatory outcomes but it is perhaps the reasoning that sits behind the actions that divides a position of moral and emotional involvement (Bathmaker and Avis 2013) from critical pedagogy. Finding a place of the continuum of professional identity between the instrumental (SET 2014) and the politically focused (McLaren & Kumar 2012) where their axiological position can be satisfied may represent a prerequisite for veteran-ness.

#### 3.4.7 Further education professionals as a class fraction

As outlined in 3.2.8, Bourdieu uses the term class fraction to describe subdivisions within a social class:

Differences in the volume of total capital demarcate inter-class divisions whereas differences in types of capital holdings delimit fractions within classes (Bourdieu, 1984: p.114).

Whether Bourdieu's (2010) concept of class fraction can be used for further education teachers is an interesting question. It is perhaps possible to position further education teachers as struggling to secure themselves as an 'autonomous field' within the wider field of education. The theory suggests that the identity of further education teachers will have evolved through being positioned within an 'antagonistic strata' (Bourdieu 2010 p.257). Further education teachers may learn to identify themselves through the struggle for position within the hierarchy of teaching, being positioned below higher education and schoolteachers both by the societal position ascribed to further education as a sector and by the lack of governmental and public understanding of what they do. Ostensibly, there is little difference between a secondary school teacher and a college teacher but as detailed in 2.8 and 2.9, the differences in training, qualification and salary show how differently these jobs are organised and rewarded. Bourdieu writes that abstract occupational positions become defined by the:

emergence of the network of competitive relations which give rise, for example, to conflicts of competence—conflicts over the qualifications for legitimate practice of the occupation and the legitimate scope of the practice—between agents (Bourdieu 2010 p.257).

In applying Bourdieu's observation, it may be concluded that further education teachers' lack of clearly standardised or mandatory qualification route for practice puts them in a disadvantaged position in the struggle to be regarded as legitimate and 'professional'. The Skills discourse portrays further education teachers as

technical instructors who command reduced 'symbolic power' (Riley 2017) within society compared to professionally legitimated schoolteachers. The data from this study will be examined to ascertain how the Veterans group have coped or adjusted their professional lives and identities to this struggle.

Seeing further education teachers as a class fraction (Bourdieu 2010) would suggest that having spent 20 years or more within their professional field my participants will have evolved a preconscious habitus or culture, based on their environment. There may not be overt recognition that they have been engaged in a struggle for position, but evidence may be observed as inscribed in their attitudes, beliefs and practices. However, as previously discussed, the environments of further education are so variable, there may be no similarities in the workplace cultures they have experienced and no continuity of habitus. Examining the Veterans' concepts of their professional identity will allow me to elicit similarities in attitudes and practices and comment further on whether the Veterans group show evidence of belonging to a distinctive class fraction.

Research on professional identity in further education was perhaps the most abundantly available amongst the general themes explored in this literature review. It could be postulated that there is so much written about it because of its extreme variability and peculiarity in comparison to school teaching, marking it out as an interesting anomaly. There is, however, something of a gap in the literature around late career teachers and how aspects of professional identity may change over time. The usefulness of some of the research on the professional identity of further education practitioners for my thesis was limited by a focus on early career teachers. For example, Bathmaker and Avis (2002, 2005, 2013) have made valuable contributions to the understanding of what it means to be a new further

education practitioner but late career teachers are only glimpsed through the eyes of the newer teachers who see them as outdated and clinging to old ways (Avis and Bathmaker 2002). I have therefore, sought to examine the tensions which may influence the late career teachers and their professional identity.

### 3.5 Power and agency

The themes that have emerged from this chapter so far are ones of tension between powers of coercion or domination and agency: power, as in the exercise of power of the state through further education policy and its enactment, and through funding and audit; the exercise of dispersed power socially through pre-conscious accepted 'logic' around class to categorise individuals but also the more subtle power of internalised ideals, expectations and self-limitations. The powerful influence of neoliberalism and the related Skills discourse on further education has been established in previous sections. For this study, I need to focus on the interplay of overarching structural articulations of power and the agency of individuals within the careers of the Veterans and find ways of theorising their actions and choices.

In this section I will continue to use Bourdieu as a resource to think about power but I will also examine the deconstructive ideas of Foucault. Bourdieu and Foucault's conceptions of power are quite different. As expressed by Bang:

The encounter between Bourdieuan and Foucauldian thought is ... an encounter between two clashing and opposed epistemologies in French thought, both of which have power at their centre (Bang 2014 p.19).

The matter of epistemologies will be discussed further in 4.3 but I recognise the structural paradigm of Bourdieu differs from the poststructuralism of Foucault.

Here, I would like to weigh the usefulness of their ideas for my study. Both writers theorise how power works in society and for individuals.

In Bourdieu's structuralist concept of power, different forms of capital confer worth in a relational way. For Bourdieu power lies in the ability 'to perpetuate or transform the distributions of the various forms of capital, maintaining or transforming the principles of redistribution (Bourdieu 2000 p.227/228). This may lie with government or elsewhere in the hierarchical structure of the social field. The power of the individual lies in the possession of capital in relation to the structure of the field.

A particular field is structured by the operation and distribution of particular forms of capital, and the ability to move in that field is tied to an agent's possession of relevant forms of capital (Gadinger 2023 p.220).

Bourdieu's intertwined concepts of field, habitus and capital can allow the integration of modes of thinking with the located environment. In terms of the Veterans' careers, Bourdieu's focus on relations of power through field and capital is useful for examining the participants' relationships to their workplace hierarchies. Looking at the operation of the field, how it has changed over time and by what means the Veterans have travelled through it may reveal something of how the participants have negotiated their way through the tensions of working inside the constantly shifting, politicised landscape of further education; for example, rising within a hierarchy may provide a strong motive for staying in a career.

Understanding the factors that have allowed the Veterans to rise through the field, or conversely those who have eschewed promotions, may also allow me to see the unspoken 'rules of the game' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) for working in further education and what confers power through capital and what does not. Thus,

Bourdieu's theories can be used to explain how or by what means the Veterans have stayed in their careers and how they have used and developed their capital according to the conditions of the field. Examining the Veterans' internalised modes of perception through the institutional habitus (Reay 2010) of their professional experience may also illuminate further why the Veterans have stayed in further education.

However, I do have some reservations in using habitus to understand personal motivations. For Bourdieu, stratified societal and economic structures are integrated into a person's habitus but Bourdieu's focus is on the potential positions 'available for some and not for others' rather than the individual themselves (Christensen 2024 p.188). The expression of power from:

a Bordieuan perspective is considered as complex phenomena, which have several aspects and foremost is attached to social structures and practice instead of individuals (Christensen 2024 p.192).

Similarly, Bourdieu's concepts of agency can be critiqued as overly structural and deterministic. Bottero (2010) argues that Bourdieu's conception of agency suffers from the intrinsic determinism of habitus and doxa that casts people who act outside of the expected parameters as anomalous:

such modulations are the exceptions proving the rule of Bourdieu's core emphasis on the systematic unity of dispositional schema, in which agents placed in 'homogeneous conditions of existence' experience 'homogeneous conditionings and trainings...producing homogeneous systems of dispositions capable of generating similar practices; and... possess a set of

common properties, objectified properties (Bottero 2010 p.17 including quote from Bourdieu, 1984 p.101).

The assumption of systematic (and sectoral) unity is problematic for my study where the interest lies in the individuality of the participants and how they have evolved as further education professionals. An assumption that determinism is implicit in habitus and doxa creates a barrier to fully understanding the professional subjectivity of the Veterans as anything more than a series of conditioned reactions.

While McNay argues that 'habitus suggests a layer of embodied experience that is not immediately amenable to self-fashioning' (McNay 1999 p.102), Bourdieu himself points out that in his application of habitus he purposely broke with structuralist language to introduce language from game theory to add an 'intentionalist view of action' (Bourdieu 2000 p.63). Scholars such as Fowler (2018) (and Joly, 2018) also defend Bourdieu against the charge of a deterministic construction of the individual, using the idea of variations of reaction to habitus and the consciousness of reflexive personal engagement with habitus and doxa, which does give room to explore the range of participants' individual agency.

Both Bourdieu and Foucault theorise that behaviours become conditioned by invisible power structures. For Foucault, the concepts of 'docile bodies' and 'technologies of power' (1977) may be seen as resonating with Bourdieu's habitus and symbolic violence (1999) as ways of explaining why people sometimes behave in ways that appear not to be in their own best interests. However, there are intrinsic differences in the way the will of the individual is conceived.

The idea of the 'docile body' emerges from Foucault's work on prisons. In 'Discipline and Punish' (1977) he gives an analysis of 'disciplinary regimes' (Foucault 1977 p.138) which shows how individuals come to discipline and limit themselves through gradually internalising the gaze of the prison warders to limit their own behaviour.

Foucault's concept of disciplinary power is somewhat analogous to habitus as it encompasses not just the evident rules of a social situation but all of the unwritten social understandings. Foucault (1977) describes and theorises how state power becomes translated through the organisation of surveillance and repeated routine, into the self-surveillance and self-discipline of the individual, literally forming habits.

What was then being formed was a policy of coercions that act on the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour. The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it... Thus, discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, "docile" bodies (Foucault 1977 p.138-9).

Foucault theorised that institutional systems use 'discipline' to socialise people into becoming 'docile bodies' who regulate themselves to operate in the required way (1977 p.138). Notably, his use of the example of the Victorian prison conspicuously shows the lack of consent in the process.

Applying the notion of docility to the further education Veterans appears disrespectful and negating of personal agency. However, the concept of coercion through surveillance and repeated practised behaviour is valuable. The participants in my study have had a long time to internalise the conditioning or 'coercions' and surveillance of their various further education institutions, so to what extent their

behaviour is that of 'practised' or 'docile' bodies is of interest. They are certainly 'practised' in that they have had lengthy experience of the systems of 'hierarchical observation' operated through training, quality processes and Ofsted but whether that had rendered them 'docile' is a question that can be explored through the analysis of the data gathered. Foucault's language of coercion offers a harsher picture of how behaviours are manipulated than Bourdieu's ideas of 'game' or even the unknowing consent of symbolic violence.

Bourdieu's own critique of Foucault's view of power was that it was 'very external' seeing disciplinary power as a 'dressage of bodies' (Bourdieu 1992 p. 196).

However, Foucault's emphasis on the embodied nature of disciplinary power to direct choices does not preclude transgression. For Foucault, disciplinary power, or indeed the more elusive power of discourse, does not 'eliminate individual autonomy' (Christensen 2024 p.190). For Foucault, power and resistance are intertwined.

In Bourdieu's conception of conditioning through habitus and symbolic violence (1999, 2010) there is emphasis on unconsciousness or implicit consent. Even in his later explanations of 'habitus of necessity' that produces a 'realist disposition' (2000 p.233), Bourdieu stresses the unconscious influence of the structures of expectations and chances. Siem and McCarthy are critical of the position of consent in Bourdieu's theory:

Individuals may be critical and sceptical of beliefs, procedures, and official priorities, etc. and yet nevertheless continue to acquiesce for entirely pragmatic reasons or out of fear (Siem & McCarthy 2023 p.439).

I find the position of the agent as either unconscious of the conditioning or passively consenting problematic. It suggests that as the researcher, I can see the conditioning of your subjectivity but you, the participant, cannot see it because it is 'pre-reflexive' or unconscious. I have to approach the Veteran teachers in my study as being intelligent people who may be well-aware of their own influences. I would not wish to make assumptions regarding their level of self-awareness. However, Siem and McCarthy's (2023) critique of the unconscious acquiescence to power implied by Bourdieu can be countered. Without diminishing the power of habitus, using an idea of reflexive agency bounded by the practicalities of social constraints (Skeggs 2002, Adams 2006, Fowler 2018), I can understand that participants may be aware of their own conditioning and have made their career decisions, possibly through fear and pragmatism but in cognisance and awareness.

The juxtaposition of the conscious and unconscious emerges again in Bourdieu's use of 'doxa' (1977) and 'symbolic power' and Foucault's use of 'discourse' (1972). The two theoretical standpoints have profound differences but there is also a number of intersections in the way they operate on the agency of the individual in terms of their conscious and unconscious belief systems.

Bourdieu defines doxa,

Doxa is the universe of the undiscussed and undisputed; the point of view of the dominant that presents itself as universal, accepted without question, and internalized as natural (Bourdieu 1977 p.165).

Deer (2008) elaborates Bourdieu's doxa as 'unquestioned shared beliefs constitutive of a field, underpinning the related notion of symbolic power' (p.121). Bourdieu identified many shared beliefs as essentially damaging or a type of

‘learned ignorance’ (Deer 2008 p.122). In my view, Foucault, is not essentially disagreeing with the influence of ‘learned ignorance’ or the misrecognition of societal constructs as natural but the mechanism differs.

For Foucault, ‘discourse’ underpins all power relationships and can be said to overlap with doxa in that it works in a subliminal way to control shared belief.

In every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality (Foucault 1981 p.52).

His theory suggests that the relationship between a socially constructed use of language, in its widest sense, and power can limit our actions by limiting our thoughts and the range or condition of possibilities that we see before us (Foucault 1972). In a similar way to doxa there is a level of unconsciousness present in the power of discourse in that ‘they are tied to long forgotten ideas, which have been transformed over time though still produce human subjects’ (Christensen 2024 p.194).

However, Foucault’s approach of uncovering the construction of discourse through his archaeological and later genealogical (1972, 1975) techniques show that discourse does not reach the depth of subconsciousness that is implied by doxa. Discourse is more easily identifiable through language usage and is changeable over time. For further education we have already seen that discourse is not unified, singular or monolithic (see 3.4). Neoliberalism and the Skills discourse may now be dominant but alternative challenging discourses exist and existed over the period of the Veterans’ careers.

Doxa goes beyond discourse in terms of the level to which it is embedded in the psyche of the individual through habitus. The concept of doxa is formed by pre-conscious habitus (Deer 2008) which makes a belief or attitude more difficult to recognise as a construct. However, Wacquant (2004) dispels the misconception that habitus, disposition and doxic beliefs cannot change. He elucidates Bourdieu's intent by stating that these personal constructs 'are socially mounted and can be eroded, countered or even dismantled by exposure to novel external forces' (Wacquant 2004 p.3). Although Wacquant is writing about dramatic events such as migration, it is also possible to see how professional experiences may change a person's understanding of the work they do. For example, in 3.3.4 the prevalence of a belief in the meritocracy of education was discussed. A further education practitioner may enter teaching with the acceptance of that concept embedded through their upbringing but then be confronted by a clashing realisation of the unfairness of the system and consequently change their conceptual paradigm.

When examining the data for this study I will be examining the underpinning beliefs of the participants to find their reasons for continuing. Perhaps I should ask how doxic is doxa? Are beliefs permanent and embedded beyond question or do they change under the influence of external forces as Wacquant (2004) suggests. How do these belief systems or constructs interact with the dominant and sub-dominant discourses of further education for the individual? How the Veterans see their own professional identity may reveal their doxic beliefs and how the changing discursive conditions of the past 20 years have interacted to influence them. The careers of the Veterans would appear to be an ideal opportunity to observe how people have reacted to the gradual accession of neoliberalism as the dominant discourse.

In both Bourdieu and Foucault there is an inherent rejection of assumptions within society that are seen as natural, in favour of perceiving constructs that are expressions of existing social relations and that arise out of particular social conditions. Both ideas are used to show how accepted 'truths' are constructed as a form of domination. Where I feel Foucault's theory departs entirely from Bourdieu's paradigm, is in his theorising of diffuse, circulating power, unattached to any person or objective structure. This is a challenging idea as it appears antithetical to the observable operation of power. Foucault's diffuse theory of power proffers an unstructured view of the operation of power when power has become 'detached from recognisable structures' (Cronin 1996 p.55). Foucault's re-imagining of how power operates (Foucault 1972, 1980, 1982), contrasts with Bourdieu's in some subtle ways. Gaventa (2003) explains that Foucault's construct of power is paradigm-shifting in that it disrupts the assumption that power is possessed as capital is possessed. Foucault's idea that power is 'discursive' (Gaventa 2003 p.1) suggests a dynamic flexing and adaptation through social interaction and language at all levels rather than it a simpler, directly hierarchical dynamic.

Foucault's theory of diffuse power problematises and decentres the state and as the only locus of power (Ball 2009, Buker 1990). Whilst still recognising the power of hierarchies, Foucault's conception of diffuse power sees it as not emanating from a specific point such as government. This idea suggests the researcher should look beyond the immediate influences of policy, funding and audit in further education to look for the other ways the participants have been manipulated by power and to what purpose. Whilst this an interesting and challenging idea, I feel it

is important that my research should not obscure the direct influence of policy, funding and audit in favour of the intangible.

Ball's (2009) deployment of Foucault's technologies of power is a useful example of how diffuse power can be used without discounting the direct power of the state. Ball explains the functioning of education in dividing and categorising people to recreate class structures in service of the national economy, necessarily maintaining the oppression of working class people. Ball (2009) is able to show the workings of diffuse power not through legislation, policy or funding but through dividing practices and the disseminating of discourses of hierarchies of intelligence.

De-centring the state is an interesting concept for examining subtle concepts such as patriarchy and meritocracy. McLaren (2002) points out how Foucault's theory of diffuse power can be useful in thinking about the multiple influences of patriarchy on women's lives.

Analyzing the ways that patriarchal power manifests itself not only in the laws and through economic inequalities, but also in social relations, is important for feminism (McLaren 2002 p.167).

This feminist interpretation of Foucault's thought suggests there may be a need to search for the additional layers of disciplinary power involved in the female participants' experience. However, I remain reserved over the application of diffuse power as I feel it can also be construed as a camouflage for the direct and intentional power of policy, funding and audit to direct the working lives of the Veterans. It is perhaps too easy to label a hidden power such as patriarchy as a 'diffuse' discourse thus ignoring acts of discrimination and illegal bias.

Agency is conceptualised differently in the work of Bourdieu and Foucault but in my view there is still scope to use these different conceptualisations in a complementary way. Although Bourdieu's 1990 work on male dominance was initially controversial, his theories have been used extensively by feminist scholars (e.g. Reay 1998, Butler 1999) to address the arbitrary nature of patriarchal constructs in a tangible way.

He [Bourdieu] articulates the nature of 'social reality' as precisely constructed but solid in a way in which postmodernist 'performances' of the self often do not seem to be (Lovell 2000 p.15).

The social reality of the further education workplace is central to my thesis. Understanding how the female participants have interacted with patriarchal influence in their environment and the differences in their experience can be enhanced by examining the structural differences of their work. The rules of the field and how capital is attributed are tangible ways of understanding the positioning of individuals.

Identifying what constitutes agency in the working lives of the Veterans may be problematic for all the participants whatever their gender. Using Bourdieu, it can be argued that what agency looks like is dependent on intersectional aspects of habitus and accrued capital and is dependent on 'the relationship between expectations and chances' (Bourdieu 2000 p.231). Habitus governs expectations and capital presents a limited range of options for action, therefore agency is limited subconsciously by the individual and either consciously or subconsciously by the field. However, Bourdieu also introduces the concept of the 'margin of freedom' (Bourdieu 2000 p.234) which is the 'basis of the autonomy of struggles

over the sense of the social world' (p.235). There is then, room for the 'transgression' of a 'social frontier' (p.236) and personal choice.

In 3.4.4, precarity as a form of symbolic domination was discussed and I would further note here, that for those who carry a greater burden of risk from precarity, be it through gender, race, disability, faith or sexuality, a lack of agency may be a very conscious state (Masquelier 2018). Rather than cognitive domination through conditioning or even pre-reflexive habitus, people may have been forced to make certain choices or behave in ways that they do not agree with. This may mean that quite small acts of resistance are important for the individual in continuing to make their working lives meaningful. It is perhaps in those small 'performances' of self and how the Veterans, whatever their gender identity, have constructed their professional self-concepts, expectations and relationships, that meaning is expressed. I want to observe how much agency is possible for these people and if they have been able to break away from the determinist parameters of habitus to become their own self-creation.

Turning to Foucault was not initially helpful for theorising acts of agency. Some early third wave feminist scholars are critical of the absence of ideas of personal agency in Foucault's early conceptions of disciplinary power. Aladjem (1991) criticises how Foucault's theory can conceive of women as docile bodies in the face of male power and McNay agrees,

This lack of a rounded theory of subjectivity or agency conflicts with a fundamental aim of the feminist project to rediscover and re-evaluate the experiences of women (McNay 1991 p.125).

However, in his later work on technologies of the self (1982, 1984, 1985)

Foucault's stance on personal agency becomes far clearer. His focus at that point is far more on a continuity of personal ethics:

those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an oeuvre that carries certain aesthetic values (Foucault 1985 p.10).

His latter stance does not discount his former position on the technologies of power such as discourse. Whilst acknowledging the limitations on personal agency, some of the early third wave feminists, (McNay 1992, McLaren 2002) agree that Foucault's later work on the self, moved away from 'docile bodies in the grip of an inexorable disciplinary power' towards 'self-determining agents who are capable of challenging and resisting structures of domination' (McNay 1991 p.4).

Aladjem (1991) is helpful in explaining what might indicate self-formatational agency for women. She used Foucault's ideas of 'transgressive practices' to theorise about small scale 'practices of freedom' in women's lives. She points out that these are not 'grandiose claims for liberty' but 'self-formative acts of freedom' (p.288). I find this concept helpful in viewing the complex formation of the acceptance or rejection of aspects of discourse that have influenced the participants. Incorporating these feminist interpretations of Foucault offers a more nuanced view of how people negotiate their way through everyday situations, making choices as they arise, choosing when to comply and when to fight. At times, consciously acquiescing or choosing strategic compliance can be interpreted as an act of 'self-care' (Foucault 1982).

What becomes clear from Foucault's concept of 'technologies of the self' (Foucault 1982, 1988) is the returning theme of intentionality which was present in the discussion of critical pedagogy (Giroux 2022). The acts of self-formation involve a certain self-awareness and personal ethic that the person is striving towards. This starts to suggest the research methods suitable for understanding the meaning behind career decisions made by the Veterans.

This section has weighed the usefulness to my project of the perspectives of Bourdieu and Foucault. Both thinkers offer analytical tools that can help me to reveal the influences in the working lives of the Veterans. Using their differing epistemological perspectives in conjunction may allow me to produce an interpretation which interrogates both the influence of societal structures, diffuse powers and the Veterans' own agency of self-creation.

Bourdieu's interlinked theories offer a framework that can be applied to both the environment of further education and the research participants. I have previously employed the theories of field, habitus, capital and symbolic violence in my interpretation of some of the literature and I believe all of these elements will be of use. For example, Reay's (2010) application of habitus to institutions, is a tool I can use to examine why the participants have decided to remain in their careers.

Similarly, Bathmaker's (2015) interpretation of field boundaries will be invaluable.

However, in studying the origins of the dispositions of my Veteran further education teachers, I can attempt to carry out what Foucault might have referred to as 'archaeology' (1972) in uncovering the past layers of the participants' interaction with further education 'to question their teleologies' (Foucault 1972 p.16) or ethical purposes and how they arrived at this point with these attitudes and beliefs. Using Foucault's 'technologies of the self' (1985) alongside feminist scholarship such as

McNay (2007) can help me see the highly individual construction of agency in the Veterans' careers.

### 3.6 Thinking tools to take forward

The picture that emerges from the literature is one of a hinterland in the educational landscape where societal tensions are enacted in ways not immediately visible from outside the sector. The highly visible discourses around the vocational nature of the field of further education obscure the underlying struggle around what counts as valuable knowledge for Veteran practitioners and how this may vary over time and context.

The literature shows a turbulent working environment. The concurrent failure of the marketisation of further education and the continuation of neoliberal policy initiatives along with compliance measures of funding and audit have dominated the working environment of the Veterans for the last 20 years. Competing purposes of instrumentalism and social justice appear to pull further education practitioners in different directions. Whilst the Veterans may have experienced the symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1999) of the devaluation of their work and have been conditioned by precarity to accept unstable working conditions, they have persevered. How they have established their subject positions as further education professionals in relation to the tensions of the sector appears central to answering questions about the longevity of the Veterans.

From the potential spectrum of subject positions, a continuum emerged. I would place the critical pedagogy of Freire (1970), hooks (2003), McLaren (2012), and Giroux (1989) aimed at social justice and social change at one end of the continuum with the ideological but more pragmatic educational justice (Fulford et al 2023), transformative teaching and learning (Duckworth and Smith 2018) and

relational pedagogy (Noddings 2003) in the centre and ending in the instrumentalist Dual Professionalism (ETF 2014). This continuum is a useful thinking tool for considering the positions of the Veterans. However, the possibility of holding several positions simultaneously became clear from the literature.

The methodological approaches to the collection and analysis of the primary data for my study must allow for the examination of these positions. Bathmaker and Avis's (2013) conclusion that further education professional identities are a faceted, nuanced construction echoes Esmond's (2017) theory of morphology in that previous life experience as well as occupational experience can be said to provide a habitus onto which a new professional subject position can be grafted. The changes that the further education Veterans who take part in this study have been through will potentially show the passage of that morphology and what events have influenced them.

Pre-existing intersectional (Crenshaw 1989) aspects of the Veterans' personal social identity will inevitably influence how they have built and maintained their professional identity. Personal characteristics such as class, race, disability and gender will have influenced the formation of their subject position. From the literature, class is perhaps the most obvious of these aspects but other characteristics may emerge from the primary data as equally important for individual participants. In 3.3.3 above, I argued that further education is positioned to reproduce a working class habitus narrowly funnelling learners into industry. From a practitioner perspective, this working class environment may be seen more positively. Le Gallais' (2009) participants (see 3.5.3) who refuse to call themselves lecturers, appear to find comfort in the working class 'institutional habitus' (Reay *et al* 2010) of their workplaces. They may be the 'fish in water' (Bourdieu and

Wacquant, 1992) experiencing further education as a culturally 'weightless' environment where the Veteran teachers may have found a comfortable institutional habitus where they feel understood and valued. What I am seeking in the study is a better understanding of the interaction between the people and the environment.

### 3.7 Research Questions

1. How have the Veteran further education practitioners maintained their careers for 20 years or over? How have they negotiated issues of precarity, policy change, funding and audit?
2. Why have the Veterans continued in further education for so long? What are the factors that have sustained their motivation? How do they see their purpose in relation to their work?

## **Chapter 4 Methodology**

### **4.1 Research Paradigm**

The paradigm for my study sits across several ontological and epistemological categories but all sit at the subjectivist/interpretivist end of the continuum. In this section I give a rationale around the ontology and epistemology for my research.

### **4.2 Ontology**

In my view, the nature of reality and the nature of knowledge about reality are both taken from the perspective of the individual within society. However, this is a 'bounded relativism' (Moon and Blackman 2014) rather than outright relativism.

The contextual facts surrounding further education such as policy, funding and audit were established in Chapter 2 and are acknowledged as producing reality.

Although those are taken as facts, I have argued (see Chapter 2) that the disparate nature of further education means that structural elements such as government policies may have very different implications depending on type of educational provision. Hence, individuals may experience the same set of events in different ways. My standpoint is that further education is experienced as a social context which is contributed to by structural elements but also by localised power relationships and individual influences.

### **4.3 Epistemology**

In this research I am seeking to construct a picture of further education through the eyes of those that work within it and to understand their individual motivations. I am looking at the Veterans as fractals of the whole, they may appear self-similar on a large scale but when examined closely, each one is unique. The nature of knowledge for this study can be described as constructivist in the basic sense that

knowledge of further education has been constructed by the participants over time.

As Schutz outlines:

All our knowledge of the world, in common-sense as well as in scientific thinking, involves constructs, i.e., a set of abstractions, generalisations, formalisations and idealisations, specific to the relevant level of thought organisation (Schutz 1962 p.5).

This study is trying to understand how the participants have constructed their abstractions, generalisations and idealisations about their work in further education. Although their experiences have been constructed within the social milieu of further education, each pathway will be different and unique. Taking a view of knowledge as constructed, suggests logically that a participant's position will change with each new experience and as such has some ephemerality.

However, the research questions are formulated to interrogate their constructs in a retrospective, reflective way to reveal how the participants' constructs have been arrived at. Their relative realities may then be graspable. Guba and Lincoln (1994) describe a constructivist epistemology as being relativist in that it suggests:

'Realities are apprehendable in the form of multiple intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based' (1994 p.110). In an epistemological sense, I only claim that knowledges or perspectives of further education were collected and the reality of those perspectives was relative to the participants' experiences at the moment of data collection.

Epistemologically, my interest for this study lies in the intersection between individual people and the array of wider social structures of society mediated through further education. Whether this can be categorised as structuralist, post-structuralist or even phenomenological has been a tension. This project is perhaps

a conversation between structuralism and post-structuralism that tries to understand the choices the participants make around their careers. I want to see how much agency the participants actually have and what are the constraints that guide them.

In the previous chapter I have referred to both Bourdieu and Foucault for theoretical guidance which suggests that my project is split between structuralism and post-structuralism. Although Bourdieu resisted labelling, his paradigm has been defined as integrating 'elements of structuralism and phenomenology' (Grenfell 2023 p.2). However, Calhoun (2002) argues that later in his career, Bourdieu moved beyond structuralism into post-structuralism. There is even more ambiguity in the epistemological position of Foucault. He is considered post-structuralist but Olssen (2003) notes the gradual shift in his position over time from structuralism to post-structuralism. I have therefore chosen an epistemological position that has elements of structuralism but leans towards post-structuralism.

The literature review has shown how influential societal structures such as class and patriarchy may be in the formation of the subject positions of the Veterans. Similarly, the literature has shown how prevalent discourses of neoliberalism and 'skills' are within further education. Whilst recognising that these social structures will influence each person, I have reasoned that each person will be influenced differently which leads me in the direction of post-structuralism, as Larson explains:

While post-structuralism leaves room for new interpretations, however, it emphasizes the social foundations of the structures that shape actors and argues that hegemonic discourses and present institutions might always be disrupted (Larson 2018 p.328).

Larson's emphasis on the potential to disrupt 'hegemonic discourses' aligns with my interest in the compliance and non-compliance or agency of the Veterans and their differing reactions to the social structures and discourses that they have encountered during their working lives.

As a world view, post-structuralism sees social reality as comprised of individual attitudes, beliefs and social identities that shape the way the world is experienced (Flick 2018). Thus, the theoretical tools I have adopted can be synthesised into a post-structuralist view to examine how those individual beliefs and attitudes have been formed. Both structuralism and post-structuralism have fed into my methodology in emphasising the need to use a variety of methods to uncover both the social structures and the discourses that surround further education and how each individual has mediated those influences.

Larson (2018) suggests that post-structuralism guides research beyond simply uncovering discourse. Mason and Clarke (2010) concur that post-structuralism is intricately associated with language use and Foucault's concept of discourse in that language shapes social reality for those who experience it. These ideas fed into the design of the data collection and analysis for this thesis by suggesting that observing the use of the participants' language around their work needed to be at the centre of the methods.

Post-structuralism challenges understandings of power structures. Angermuller (2020) points out that post-structuralism has been used extensively as a 'model for a reflexive critique of power' (2020 p.4). For example, prominent feminist scholars such as Butler (2007) have used post-structuralism for the purposes of critique of essentialist constructs of the feminine. Being able to think about female experience without any assumption that there is any single or essential female experience is

important to guard against pre-judgement and assumption. Using post-structuralism, contradictory subject positions can be equally recognised:

rather than having a fixed core or essence, subjectivity is constructed through language and is, therefore, an open ended, contradictory and culturally specific amalgam of different subject positions (McNay 2007 p.2).

In adopting this highly individualised approach to the subject positions of my participants, I rejected the opportunity to draw generalisable conclusions from the data. I am not intending to build a generalisable picture of what a further education practitioner is like or why they do what they do. I am seeking to critique an essentialist view of further education teachers as industrial trainers and to deconstruct the damaging dualism that positions their work as lesser in comparison to other types of teacher.

In any social research but perhaps to a greater extent in an interpretivist paradigm, it is essential to practise reflexivity. Reflexivity can be described as 'objectifying the very conceptualisation and process of scientific objectification' (Deer 2008 p.200). Epistemologically, reflexivity must be built into to a study from conception of how a piece of research is designed. Bourdieu urged researchers to:

to convert reflexivity into a disposition, constitutive of their scientific habitus, a reflexivity reflex, capable of acting not *ex poste*, on the *opus operatum*, but *a priori*, on the *modus operandi* (Bourdieu 2004 p.89).

Therefore, prior to the design process, I must critically examine my position within society, my ingrained habits and dispositions, and the specific institutional environment I work in. This practice involves acknowledging how my personal

background, research interests, and the institutional setting shape both the questions I choose to investigate and the resulting interpretations I generate.

#### 4.4 Reflexivity

The intention of this study is to operate in an ethical, respectful way that does not impose the hierarchical constructs of the researcher on either the participants through the process of research or on the data through unconscious bias. I have already stated my personal interest in the subject area and my reasons for wanting to understand more about Veterans in further education. Prior to and during implementation, I carried out a series of reflexive exercises aimed at recognising my 'pre-reflexive grasp of the social world' (Deer 2008 p.202) that I am studying.

##### 4.4.1 Interrogating my own Truth

I used questions such as 'Do I have a personal insider position and truth about the topic I am researching?' (Atkins and Duckworth 2019 p.78) to examine my researcher position. Having a personal 'truth' about a topic infers bias and prejudgement of the possible findings. An insider position can therefore be construed as a threat to the trustworthiness of the research. The most obvious danger of bias for my study was the unconscious bias of the insider due to my decades of work in further education. Kerstetter (2012) cautions that an insider position can make it difficult for the researcher to 'separate their personal experiences from those of the research participants' (p.2). The danger was that I would make assumptions that there were similarities in experiences, priorities and opinions that did not exist. During the formational period of reflexive reflection, I did struggle with positioning myself either as insider, outsider or even 'alongsider' (Clandinin and Connelly 2000, Chalachanová 2020) or 'inbetweeners' (Milligan 2014). Whether this piece of research is being positioned as 'insider' *per se* is

debatable. That it should fall into the insider category is based on the profile of the participants for the study who will be drawn from the same or similar professional background and working culture as the researcher. There may be a shared professional lexicon and understandings of workplace culture. There will certainly be similarities in age and length of experience in the profession. However, the fragmented nature of the further education sector has been explored previous chapters. The sample of participants ranged across different kinds of further education providers and the workplace culture of a SEND college may be very different to that of an apprenticeship provider. It can be argued therefore, that institutional differences may limit the potentially shared characteristics between the researcher and the participants, from reaching the threshold of being wholly an 'insider'. Even so, there are likely to be too many shared characteristics for me to be considered as wholly an outsider. I am not the *tabula rasa* that would be expected of an 'etic' observer (Madden 2017 p.147). Madden (2017 p.110) suggests that it is possible to adopt both positions simultaneously, 'Outsider and insider perspectives are not incompatible...and can be used together without a 'sense of schism'. The insider position can bring the researcher easier access and also credibility and approachability in the eyes of the participants which may ease the 'research encounter' (Adu-Ampong & Adams 2020 p.2). However, retaining an element of strangeness can also be useful in preventing assumptions on the part of the participant. Adu-Ampong and Adams (2020) explain how participants may assume that the researcher already knows or understands facets of the topic so there is no need to voice them. He rejects the binary positions of being either an insider or outsider, finding in his experience that 'a researcher's identity as an insider and/or an outsider is never a settled status but one in constant flux and

negotiation' (Adu-Ampong & Adams 2020 p. 9). He concludes that each research encounter with a new participant requires the researcher to adopt a position in relation to that person.

The concept of the 'alongsider' is perhaps more pertinent in that it suggests shared experience without any implied power relationship (Clandinin and Connelly 2000). However, there was no intention of spending extended amounts of time in the participants' environment in the way some 'alongsider' studies use (Clandinin and Connelly 2000, Chalachanová *et al* 2020) but I did want to cultivate the connection of shared experience to build a relationship with the participants to encourage sharing of personal experience relevant to the study. Positioning myself as an 'alongsider' was an intention but how I was perceived by the participants was unpredictable and perhaps influenced by personal characteristics such as gender, sexuality, social class, ethnicity and culture.

#### 4.4.2 Social Identity Map

To better understand my own positionality, I created a 'social identity map' of my own identity based on the work of Jacobsen and Mustafa (2019) with a few added elements which were not in their original. This exercise was helpful in drawing out my personal position. I started the process with the idea that I was something of an 'insider' (Milligan 2014) due to my decades of experience in further education. However, this mapping exercise brought me to realise that I had could have no understanding of the working lives of people whose characteristics marginalise them in the workforce.

As a cisgender, heterosexual, white woman without any immediately observable disability, I have no insight into the experience of maintaining a career in further

education if one has elements of identity that might make one's employment vulnerable. Similarly, living and working in my first culture and language, I have experienced the privilege of relatively easy access to work (Bhopal 2018). I have only worked in institutions where the majority of people look and sound like me. I cannot claim fellowship of experience with people who have had to struggle through the barriers of racism.

As a result of this exercise, I was able to recognise my own privileged position and the damaging assumption that I already had a general understanding of the working lives of the participants. This was an assumption that I had to continue to check throughout the data collection and data analysis process. For example, I had to constantly check and re-check that I was not making assumptions about how people experience the ageing process in the workplace. Being a similar age to the participants may have meant that people were more willing to express their own concerns around ageing but it cannot imply, an unconscious understanding of the social position occupied by another person. I had to check that I was not superimposing my own tensions onto the participants. As a result, I did not ask any questions directly concerning the ageing process as I felt that if it was something that they felt strongly about, they would include it in their open narrative.

#### Position Statement

As a second stage, I carried out a reflexive exercise of writing out a positionality statement (Holmes 2020, Goundar 2025). This used the insight I had gained from creating the social identity map and allowed me to think more deeply about my own political standpoint and how this might influence the study. I realised I had several baseless, idealised stereotypes of the long serving further education teacher. For example, that teachers share a left-leaning political position which objectively I

know is untrue. My imagined Veteran was someone who is dedicated to their profession and has an abiding care for their learners. Again, I had to check this idealisation and remind myself that there can be multiple personal reasons for people to stay in a career that do not in any way reflect my idealisation.

The exercise brought me to the realisation that although neutrality is impossible, I must not idealise the participants or conversely, judge them for not complying with an imagined ideal. However, an attitude of non-judgemental unconditional positive regard (Rogers 1956) was adopted regarding their embodiment of professionalism, opinions and actions. As an extension to this stage, I delved back into my training as a workplace mediator to remind myself about neutral positioning and techniques for maintaining neutrality.

#### 4.5 Introduction to the qualitative design

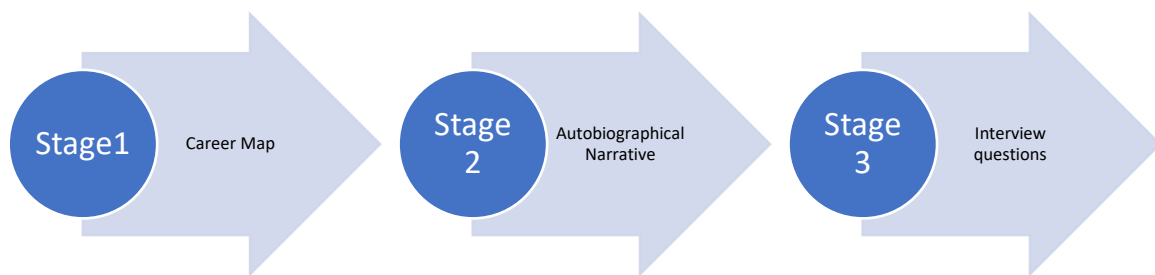
My aim in designing the data collection was to capture a picture of the disposition or evolved subject position that may explain the Veterans' ability and desire to remain so long in further education. The question for the design was how best to reveal the Veterans' accumulated layers of experience and formative influences. Capturing personal stories and experiential perspectives in a way that recognised and valued individuality and context was important in designing the approach.

Therefore, in line with an interpretivist paradigm, a variety of qualitative types of listening were designed to gather the Veterans' individual reflections on working life in further education. The data gathering employed a staged sequential research design, in which each stage built on the previous one. A mixture of methods was used to gather both the historical factual elements and the subjective recollections of the Veterans.

The design draws on narrative inquiry (NI) literature to inform the design such as the work of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), Frank (2010, 2012, 2018), Caine and Clandinin (2013, 2022) and Riessman (2005 a, 2005 b, 2008). However, the environmental immersion that is part of an NI approach was not adopted for a range of reasons. It would not serve the aims of this retrospective study to be present in the participants' environment and it would draw attention from their employers thus nullifying anonymity. Guidance was also sought from a range of narrative researchers who informed the design of data collection and data analysis such as; Labov (1982), Goodson (2012, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2018), Denzin (1989, 2013), Barrett (2015), and Reed-Danahay (2005)

#### 4.5.1 Overview of the research design

The design of the data collection reflects the interpretive, constructivist positioning of the study. The methods were designed to take a funnelled, overlapping and multi-layered approach. Each stage of the design was intended to produce greater detail about the participants' experiences and foregrounds the voice of the participant. There were three stages of the data collection with an additional fourth small interaction aimed at checking the participants' agreement of the text produced. Collecting three types of data was intended to provide historical context to help identify the 'generative structures' (Barrett 2015, Reed-Danahay 2005) that have influenced the participants' stories.



The first stage of the interaction with the participant was quite tightly focused with the aim of gathering personal and career information and producing a timeline, map or diagram to reflect the participants' career journey. The second stage of interaction was more wide ranging, allowing an unstructured narrative career autobiography to be produced. The third stage of interaction was an interview focused on producing greater detail of the themes found in stage two and introducing exterior contextualising data to the dialogue. At the third stage the participants were asked to consider which events such as policy changes in further education impacted their work.

There was a fourth interaction, but this was a check aimed at sharing the data gathered in a text format and having it affirmed by the participant that they were happy that the text was a fair and accurate representation of what they said.

#### 4.5.2 Justification of stage one career map

Stage one of the data collection was planned as an initial semi-standardised introductory conversation/interview aimed at gathering demographic and career outline information, however, this stage had multiple purposes. It was important for context to get a chronological timeline so that I could match up events in further education and the world with the events in their careers. Barrett (2015 p.7)

emphasises the 'need to contextualise life history narratives when interpreted within a Bourdieusian framework'. However, contextualisation was not intended as quasi triangulation to catch inconsistencies. For example, if the participants chose not include a period of their career in their later narrative it would be of interest for interpretation rather than an error.

The career map was a framing for the research puzzle (Clandinin and Connelly 2000) to be studied, to allow both myself and the participant to see their career as a whole before beginning on the detail. Clandinin (2016 p.22) emphasises the need to contextualise narrative in three dimensions of 'temporality', 'place' and 'sociality'. The career map was particularly focused on providing context of time and place but it was also planned to provide some context in terms of their socio-cultural position in terms of field (Thomson 2008). I wanted to create a simple diagram of their field of operation to see how they moved around further education in terms of types of provision and different employments. This would start to give an indication of the workplace cultures that they had experienced that may have influenced their subject position. I also wanted to see how often they had moved between jobs and the job titles they had. Job titles indicate their hierarchical position and show the acquisition of symbolic capital over a career; they may also be an indicator of economic capital.

The process of creating the map was planned as a psychological framing exercise to prompt the participant to start the process of remembering. I thought that having to recall each stage in their career chronologically would prevent over-concentration on their current lives when they started the narrative stage

#### 4.5.3 Ethical considerations of the career map

Although I was interested in their economic capital and its relationship to career decisions, I eventually decided not to ask questions about salary as I was trying to establish a non-confrontational tone and reasoned that such information would be considered too sensitive.

The co-creation of the map was also intended to bring a trust building element to this stage of the process. Performing a physical task together, drawing the map, does not require making direct eye contact which can feel confrontational. Talking in a fairly superficial way about the jobs they have had was planned as a non-invasive rapport building exercise that would allow us to get to know each other.

#### 4.5.4 Justification of stage two autobiographical work-life narrative

The main aim of this stage of the data gathering was to capture a sense of habitus and allow me to explore the dispositions evolved (Grenfell 2015) by the Veterans over the course of their working lives. Autobiography created through narration was chosen, as opposed to using solely semi-structured interviews, due to the desire to deepen the participants' reflective thought and broaden the opportunities to reveal the constructive elements of their subject position. I was interested in how the stories they told presented their professional self in an unmediated way as possible. The way that they chose to portray themselves in what they emphasised, what they saw as triumphs and failures offered an insight into 'the particular investments that individuals possess and their engagement in historically meaningful "social games" (Barratt 2015 p.7).

Autobiographical narrative was also planned to capture a picture of further education over time as it has been experienced by the Veterans. Using the Bourdieusian theory of habitus, narrative can expose the tensions of further education as a social space (Barratt 2015). Writing late in his career, Bourdieu

recognised the importance of 'storied' experiences for understanding the nuance of social situations:

Narratives about the most "personal" difficulties, the apparently most strictly subjective tensions and contradictions, frequently articulate the deepest structures of the social world and their contradictions. This is never so obvious as it is for occupants of precarious positions who turn out to be extraordinary "practical analysts": situated at points where social structures "work," and therefore worked over by the contradictions of these structures, these individuals are constrained, in order to live or to survive, to practise a kind of self-analysis, which often gives them access to the objective contradictions which have them in their grasp, and to the objective structures expressed in and by these contradictions (Bourdieu 1999 p.511).

For me this means, the picture of a system seen from the inside can show the contradictions that exist and how individuals mitigate and live with issues that may look very simple from the outside. For example, I was interested in how the Veterans have been impacted by further education policies and the neoliberalisation of their work environment.

Narrative also exposes the unseen, microscopic detail of how individuals interact with systems. Goodson (2013) uses the metaphor of 'refraction' to describe how an individual's personal response to systems and structures can be seen as a 'mediating membrane' in that their personal agency is a 'point of refraction' through which the everyday reality of an social structure can be viewed (Goodson 2013 p.7). The idea of light bouncing off a reflective surface in an unexpected direction or being bent by water offers a visual image for thinking about how people experience the same events in different ways. This aspect of a narrative approach was

attractive because it enabled me to see the further education sector through the eyes of the participants.

Using a narrative approach was aimed at revealing unexpected facets of participant experience around their lives in further education. Moreover, narrativity is aimed at revealing and exploring ambiguous positions rather than 'tidying them away' (Bathmaker 2010 p.2). Being able to capture the 'untidy' features of the participants' careers through their narratives was therefore vital to understanding the multiple influences that had created their Veteran status.

#### 4.5.4.1 Ethical considerations of the autobiographical work-life narrative

I chose autobiographical narrative as an approach partially for ethical reasons. Goodson (2013) suggests that there may be actual benefits to the participants through taking part in such a study. I did not plan narrative as a form of therapy but the process of 'personalised elaboration' allows people to reflect on an extended basis and learn from their experiences in a way that can benefit their future. A professional autobiographical narrative can become a wide-lens piece of reflective practice as utilised by Brookfield (2005). The research offered an opportunity to practitioners not just to recall and celebrate their work in further education but also come to a deeper understanding of their practice and potentially initiate changes for the future.

I chose to frame the narrative stage of the data gathering as work-life stories rather than whole-life stories after reading Goodson (2013, 2018) and Denzin (2013). Goodson had used what he calls 'work life stories' of teachers which helped the participants focus more exclusively on the aims of the research. Denzin, whilst focusing on the personal, used narratives to also allow for the examination of the

‘culture, discourse, history and ideology’ (Denzin 2013 p.10). I felt that whole-life stories were ethically too intrusive to ask for from the participants. Riessman (2005a) writes about the ethical implications of the relational intimacy that can occur from such narrative conversations which can make emotional demands on the participant and the listener. I did not want to put participants under the emotional pressure that a whole-life narrative might entail or to reveal more than they felt comfortable with. I felt that it might make people reluctant to participate if they thought it was going to be too personal.

At the planning stage, I was unable to see the relevance of life details such as divorce to a professional identity. I also thought that the data gathered would be too expansive and perhaps hardly focus on their work at all which would not meet the aim of the data gathering.

As part of the general ethical considerations, I informed the participants that the recording could be switched off at any time. Additionally, supplying a transcript of the recording to the participants prior to analysis was planned to allow them to ask for the removal of anything they had said that they subsequently felt was too personal.

#### 4.5.5 Justification of stage three unstructured interview

The third stage of the data gathering was planned as an unstructured interview where questions were asked about contextual aspects of their work-life in further education drawn from their narrative. This stage of the process was dialogic and aimed at gaining greater insight into aspects of the narrative. It was also aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of the social, temporal and physical worlds of the participant (Pino Gavida and Adu 2022). I wanted to ask questions aimed at

exploring the wider historical and sectoral context and the participants' position in relation to that social context.

This stage was historical in terms of taking what they had said about their time in further education in their career map and their narration and asking questions based both on the specific issues or themes that they had raised and events in sector during their careers. This historicization allowed a deeper understanding of how personal experience was impacted by the powerful discourses that were current at the times they were working in further education (Bathmaker 2010 p.2).

Although Goodson advises that a dialogical stage of data gathering can be used as a proxy for triangulation (Goodson 2013 p.38), I did not intend to check if the participants' story was truthful or accurate but I was triangulating in the sense that I was confirming and delving more deeply into their understandings and influences. The questions allowed for checking of the impressions I had formed at the earlier stages regarding how they had constructed their teacher identity and what that meant to them. Gathering outward looking additional data around the policy history of further education allowed me to ask questions that directed the participants' thoughts towards my research aims; to get a picture of how external issues such as policy, funding and audit cultures had impacted them.

#### 4.5.5.1 Ethical considerations of unstructured interview

There was a concern that questioning the participants about specific events might trigger bad memories. As previously stated, I did not plan to challenge gaps in the narrative but rather treat gaps as active choices. To protect the participants, I only framed questions around areas they had already chosen to speak about.

#### 4.5.6 Trustworthiness of the planned approach

For this qualitative study, issues of validity and reliability were considered through the concept of 'trustworthiness' (Lincoln and Guba 1985). The main focus of this concern, in congruence with the constructivist paradigm, was to give an accurate, honest representation of the participants' voices rather than to ensure that what they said is 'true' or not. Trustworthiness is a difficult issue for a qualitative study such as this. Frank (2018) noted that narrative approaches face questions of the veracity or fictionality of stories. However, Caine and Clandinin (2022) counter that there is no expectation that narrative will capture fixed versions of the past but in narrative, trustworthiness is a continuity that accurately represents the participant's truth.

The three-stage process of data collection was planned to increase the continuity (Caine and Clandinin 2022) or dependability (Lincoln and Guba 1985) of the data which was increased by the overlapping methods. The stages of the research design were arranged to confirm one another in order to represent an honest reflection of the participants' perspective.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) caution that although the representation obtained through narrative will always be subjective. To be considered dependable, it must be congruent with the participant's own reality and not altered or constructed for the purpose of the research. They suggest that misrepresentation in any narrative may be prompted by a wish to appear in a desired way or based on a desire to give the 'right' answer. For this study there is no 'right' answer, particularly for the narrative 'work-life story' stage of the study where each person is giving their individual story. Although each person will inevitably curate their narrative towards the image they wish to give, I would see that curation as the most revealing part of their contribution rather than making the text unreliable.

This study was planned to be a 'retrospective,' in other words it is looking backwards on the careers of the participants. Flick (2018) suggests that the problems with the trustworthiness of a retrospective narrative could be that the past and present can become merged. People's memories of events are altered by later outcomes. For this study that overlay is an important resource as the participants are being asked to evaluate the impact of changes to the further education sector over time. For example, a change to policy may have seemed wonderful at the time but might have had unexpected consequences. The benefit of hindsight is therefore central to my choice of retrospective narrative.

The recognition of the subjectivity involved in personal reminiscence and interpretation of significant events in further education has been used in this thesis as part of the narrative process rather than a flaw in the data (Goodson 2013). The personal interpretation of the past was therefore examined at the second stage of 'life history' reflection on the narrative.

Interaction with the researcher can be a threat to dependability (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). Although there is no 'right' answer, I acknowledge that there is a risk of reactivity due to the amount of interaction between researcher and the participant. People can even unconsciously adapt themselves to their perceptions of the researcher and the stated aims of the research (Maxwell 2012).

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) therefore suggest that it is impossible to eliminate the possibility of researcher influence. Accepting this as a fundamental underpinning of qualitative research does not completely assuage any concerns. Rather, as Maxwell (2012 p.282) suggests 'the goal of qualitative study is not to eliminate this influence, but to understand it and use it productively'.

To use my researcher influence productively, I tried to focus participants on elements of their work history and current practice that may previously have gone unnoticed. This type of macro-reflection is not something that a practitioner would do as part of their practice improvement so I felt it could be helpful in widening their reflective perspective. However, to mitigate against leading the participants in a particular direction I created the questions for each Stage 3 interview based on what the participant had said during the open narrative stage. Therefore, I was exploring further and confirming themes that they themselves had chosen without prompting.

#### 4.5.7 Justification of sample size and sampling

This study adopts a qualitative research design utilising a hybrid narrative inquiry approach that prioritises depth of understanding over breadth of coverage (Clandinin 2013). The sample comprises six participants, selected purposefully for their relevance to the research focus. In qualitative inquiry, the aim is not statistical generalisation but the generation of rich, nuanced insights that illuminate the complexity of the phenomenon under investigation. A small sample enables in-depth interaction with participants' perspectives, allowing for detailed exploration of meanings, contexts, and experiences. Such depth is essential for developing conceptual arguments and identifying emergent themes that can inform theory-building. Furthermore, qualitative traditions emphasise theoretical saturation rather than numerical size. When data are sufficiently rich and varied, even a small number of participants can yield significant contributions to knowledge. This approach aligns with the interpretive and generative nature of my doctoral research, where the goal is to produce original insights rather than universal claims.

#### 4.5.8 Selection criteria

A purposive sampling approach was chosen as a way of to support the aims of the study. The selection criteria were therefore prompted primarily by finding people who were most suited to provide rich, deep, experiential information about veteran-ness in further education.

Therefore, length of experience was the first criterion to be set. Around 20 years' experience was the preferred range. However, Negrin (2022) cautions that having too narrowly defined criteria can negatively affect recruitment. I therefore did not use 20 years as a fixed criterion. Negrin (2022) advises that a familiarity with the population to be studied is important when selecting inclusion criteria. Using my awareness that some further education teachers enter the profession later in their working lives as a second career, I used a parameter of 15 – 20 years as a selection window.

The second criterion was to select people from a variety of types of further education provision. This criterion was targeted purposively to 'provide rich information and, accordingly, yield an in-depth understanding of the investigated phenomenon' (Ahmad and Wilkins 2024 p.1462). The purpose of this was to be able to garner experiences from across the sector. My plan was to select participants in sequence rather than all at once to try and see where I had gaps and recruit the subsequent participants to fill those gaps.

Although teachers were the primary focus of this study and they were the preferred participants, I did not fix a criterion around this for participation. People who have been teachers but are now managers were considered eligible. I did not exclude people who had retired from the sector within the last three years. I also did not

exclude people who work in support roles such as learning support worker or teaching assistant who might add an extra perspective to the findings.

I excluded people I worked with directly as participants as I felt this could be ethically compromising if they said something critical about the institution or revealed practices considered against the employer's policies. I also felt that being a direct colleague would inhibit or influence what the participant said.

Kristensen and Ravn (2015) stress the importance of considering who is heard and who is silenced by the selection of participants in qualitative research studies. I felt it was important to select participants with a variety of personal characteristics. I did therefore actively seek to recruit a participant of colour. Gender was considered as a criterion as I did not want one gender to dominate the sample. I did not consider other personal characteristics such as age to be a specific criterion, experience of further education was considered a more desirable indicator of suitability.

#### 4.5.9 Recruitment of participants

For the ethical protection of participants, recruitment took place via professional networks and personal contacts rather than through employers or institutions. This meant that their employers had no knowledge of their participation and it would not be able to associate the participants' recollections with any specific institution.

The pandemic had an impact on recruitment inasmuch as I had intended to use inter-institution peer conferences to identify potential participants for my study. The pandemic curtailed all face-to-face conferences and meetings which meant I was unable to use this route. I was however, able to use existing contacts made through these networks. In the planning stage, I was concerned that selecting participants in this opportunistic way could potentially be geographically limiting

and produce a regional focus on the South-West of England. However, using my supervisors' wider professional networks enabled recruitment that covered a wider geographical area.

My plan was to garner data that represented the breadth of further education and therefore recruit participants in a sequence and choose the next person according to the data I already had. My first participant had worked across the majority of types of provision which made selection of further participants easier.

Initial approaches were made via emails that were forwarded to potential participants with researcher contact details. Further email communications followed before full written participation agreement was eventually sought. For these communications a BCU email account was used rather than a professional or personal one.

Once a potential participant had made contact, some basic data to inform the inclusion/exclusion decision was gathered via email correspondence. This worked both ways allowing the potential participant to ask any questions they had prior to giving their consent. This established a friendly professional correspondence relationship that would set the tone for later interactions.

#### 4.5.10 Ethical Compliance

This section is concerned with compliance with ethical codes. The methodological ethical and moral implications of the different relationships encountered during the research are discussed under implementation.

The research was designed to comply with two frameworks: The British Educational Research Ethical Guidelines (BERA 2018) and Birmingham City

University ethical guidelines (BCU n.d.). This should not be a barrier as generally the documents reinforce one-another.

The principle of voluntary informed consent has underpinned my responsibility to participants. This is defined by BERA as 'the condition in which participants understand and agree to their participation without any duress, prior to the research getting underway' (2018 p.5). This section will explore how this will be applied.

First contact with potential participants was made via email as stated above. For those who expressed an interest, information about the research was sent in another email. The explanation included: a short summary of the aims and objectives of the research, how the information would be used, also an example of the extent of the time commitment that would be involved. Using email to give the information gave some protection from influence that could be exerted by having the researcher present in the room when seeking consent.

Discussions of the transcript of the interactions took place via on-line platforms prior to writing up the report to give participants the opportunity to correct any errors or misconceptions. Allowing recording was part of the agreement but as conferencing platforms clearly show when a recording is being made, there is less chance of someone objecting later because they had forgotten that they were on tape.

Participants were given a draft copy of the research report to agree or negotiate editing prior to the final completion. This gave participants the opportunity to ensure that any information they had provided had been used according to the agreement. They could ask for anything they considered too sensitive to be taken out. This

could possibly have an inhibiting influence on the analysis and interpretation of data. However, it would seem to be unavoidable if full ethical protection is to be given to the participants.

Anonymity was built into the data collection regarding participant identities and the identity of any institution referred in connection with the participants' reflective accounts. I wanted the participants to feel comfortable to give their narratives in an open and honest way without any fears that what they say could bring adverse judgements from their employers or peers. Pseudonyms chosen by the participants were used. The use of a chosen name will ensure that the participant can still identify themselves and the way their data has been used. All participant information was stored on BCU servers rather than private ones in accordance with BCU rules.

Although the participants were regarded as independent actors and not representative of a particular organisation, it was anticipated that participants might be critical of policies and procedures operated by previous or current employers. Protecting the identity of any institution was therefor considered important to prevent any reputational damage that could result from participant criticism. To further strengthen anonymity I ensured that contextual information provided in the descriptions of workplaces will give detail such as 'rural' and nature of the provision but will not refer to specific geographical locations or features which could lead to identification.

The right to withdraw was a fundamental principle of the research (BERA 2018 p.5). This operated on two levels. It was anticipated that some participants who initially volunteered, would lose interest or find that under the pressure of work they no longer wish to participate. They were offered two options: firstly, to stop

participation but to leave the data they have contributed so far as part of the study, secondly to withdraw completely including having all their data withdrawn from the study. The use of pseudonyms would have allowed for the simple removal of the data pertaining to that participant. Recording and transcripts would have been deleted.

I anticipated from the start that the time commitment being asked of the participants might be problematic. The multiple meetings that were originally planned could result in people feeling that it is taking up too much time and deciding to stop their contribution. This did prove to be the case. To mitigate this issue, the stages of data collection were amalgamated into one meeting for the majority of participants. The time commitment in total was reduced to around two hours.

#### 4.6 The Implementation stage

##### 4.6.1 Pre-pilot autobiographical work narrative

I carried out a pre-pilot self-test using myself as a participant. Completing the process as an autobiographical exercise was intended to allow both a test of the method but also to inform the reflexive process. Drawing out personal themes was intended to expose latent assumptions and biases. These fed back into the reflexive statement which was revisited throughout the data collection period.

##### 4.6.2 Piloting and adjustment of the method

Two artefacts were produced from the pre-pilot initial self-testing. The first was a rough visual diagram which gave shape to a career (discussed more fully below). The second was a transcription of the work-life story narrative. I had intended to use these artefacts as examples when explaining the process to participants. The

learning that came from the pre-pilot regarding honing the skill of participant interaction was that maintaining speaking to a recording device without a human audience was quite difficult. I felt that the career diagram helped to give a general shape to the narrative and was useful.

Experimenting with carrying out the analysis was the most useful aspect of the pre-pilot. I used a grid template that I had created using an amalgamation of Labov (1982), Riessman (2005 b & 2008) and Frank (2010). I included the question suggested by Frank (2010) about why an incident has been chosen for narrative and concluded that even for myself, trying to pin down a reason can be speculative. I chose the incidents I narrated and for some incidents there appeared to be no specific reason apart from them being the next thing that happened. It was possible to draw out more overarching initial themes using Riessman (2008) and Frank (2010).

When trying out the second stage of the pilot, with a volunteer, I attempted to follow the plan I had made. I started to make the career map as a separate activity but once the person had started talking, it was clear they were going to give me the whole story. I had to ask them to stop for a second and repeat because I hadn't got the recorder on. They restarted but I felt some of the original verve of the first telling was lost. In my reading on narrative Goodson (2013) had written that the less you can interrupt people the better and this seemed to be true. It is important not to break the participant's train of thought.

One of the main objectives of the pilot was to test out the data collection procedure and find out how practical it was. The pilot showed the need to compress the planned three meetings into one. The participant was interested in the study and keen to take part but made it clear that three meetings would prevent a

commitment. All of the three stages (career map, career narrative and working-life history interview) were therefore, conducted at one meeting. I had thought that I would need time to draw points from the narrative in order to plan relevant questions for the interview. However, I found that with attentive listening to the narrative, the questions I wanted to ask came to mind naturally. This meant that the interview became a dialogue that picked-up on the themes presented in the monologue.

Testing out the approach to analysis was the second purpose of the pilot.

Analysing the narrative using the framework that I had constructed from my reading was not difficult but initially, I felt that it lacked depth. I found that I needed to revisit it several times and each time, I saw something new.

I learnt several things that helped me to perfect the process. These included turning the recorder on from the start, not to leave a gap between the career map and the narrative, to listen and make notes about questions to ask in the interview stage and to be flexible about when the interview stage takes place.

#### 4.6.3 Ethical adjustments during implementation

##### 4.6.3.1 The pandemic

This research took place against a backdrop of the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic. Efforts to control the spread of the infection brought about repeated lockdowns, restricting movement and limiting social interaction. Although the research permissions involved a clear plan for safe interaction, adjustments had to be made not just for physical safety but also for the psychological comfort of the participants. People reacted in very different ways to perceived risk and I had to ensure that not only did I follow rules but that the participants did not feel at risk.

The design of the research was not significantly altered by the pandemic but the need to conduct interviews via an internet-based interface such as Zoom or Teams for the safety of all parties was built in. The main concern was that the inability to be in the same room could impede the building of a rapport with the participant. Face-to-face interaction would have been preferred, particularly in the early stages when trust was being established. Body language and physical presence are important interpretation tools which is sometimes missing online (Archibald *et al* 2019). The absence of physical cues during a conversation places an exaggerated focus on facial expressions so it was important to be mindful of unintended messages that could be construed from an interviewee observing the face of the interviewer so closely. It was also important to avoid looking disinterested or distracted when listening to a participant for an extended length of time. Keeping eye contact was difficult on video conferencing media; when looking at the face of the other person on a screen, eye contact may be difficult to establish and maintain. Remembering to look at the camera, rather than the face on the screen, was helpful in encouraging the person to carry on speaking. Other active listening techniques such as nodding and making encouraging noises, without interrupting the flow of the narrative, were still employed online as they would in person (Kline 2015).

Protocols and agreements regarding the conduct of the interviewer and interviewee during online interaction were established as part of the initial agreement stage. Establishing an online etiquette for privacy and concentration were important in creating a conducive environment for the narrative to be produced. Recording of the interviews was easier online as the platform flags to the participants when they are being recorded.

There were advantages in that video conferencing removed any geographical barriers which restrict the choice of participants. It gave more opportunities for the timings of encounters which could happen when the participant had free time and was happier to talk. They were able to produce their narrative in a space where they felt comfortable without feeling intruded upon. The face-to-face interviews would have taken place in a workplace or public venue whereas the video conferences could be in the participants' own homes.

Some of the early face-to-face interactions were more impacted by COVID restrictions in that greater care had to be taken with choosing locations. Wearing face masks muffled voices and physical distance interfered with rapport building, particularly when emotional memories surfaced. As restrictions lifted, the data collected at the end of the process was less impacted.

At the time, the adjustments made for COVID seemed laborious but in retrospect I captured a picture of how the different people were coping with the stress that it put everybody under.

#### 4.6.3.2 Reflexive ethical responses during implementation

I kept a research journal as a tool for checking my own bias during the research process. I employed Atkins and Duckworth (2019 p.79) method of using self-questioning such as, 'how is this limiting what I am seeing and what I am doing?'. Journalling also helped me to develop my research skills around participant interaction. Madden (2017), and Gray (2018) suggest that journalling can help develop research skills through reflecting on the implementation of the method as the project progresses. Recording the process of improvement can secure the altered elements for the next cycle of narrative interviews. I was able to remind myself of things that had not gone quite right so that I could make corrections. For

example, in one early participant interaction, the instructions about what I was intending to do were not clear enough and the person started to give the narrative before giving their basic information. My journaling notes allowed me to refine how I gave the initial introduction to make it clear there were different stages to the interaction.

In this section I have given an anonymised detail about the ethical and reflexive decisions I made during the implementation of the data gathering. The anonymisation is firstly intended to protect the participants but also to allow for discussion of the process rather than the people. In 6.1 there is further attributed explanation of the individual responses where that is appropriate.

In four of the six interactions I had to make reactive responses to decide what was or was not data for the study. There were points where I turned off the recording device for various reasons. I had already informed participants that I would turn it off if requested. None of the participant asked me to turn it off but I at the time, I judged that they were sharing things with me on a deeply personal level that they would not want to read back once transcribed. The physical action was also an indication to them that we were off the record. These were largely events in their lives outside of work such as details of divorce, abuse, homelessness and criminal activity but also detail of safeguarding cases that should not be shared. These parts of the narration were explanatory about choices such as moving to different areas or about their motivation to teach and did give me a fuller understanding of the person, but I chose to leave them out of the data as I felt they were too personal and not of immediate relevance to the research. I was also concerned that the level of detail could also perhaps allow for personal identification.

I carried out reflexive bias checking throughout the analysis. However, there was one participant that I did not build a rapport with. The meeting gradually took a tone that I found uncomfortable and included comments of a sexist nature that I would normally challenge. I cut the interaction shorter than it might have been as at the time I was concerned about what might be said.

When starting to analyse the data from this interaction, I was aware that every interpretation I made was based on a personal reaction to the participant. In Bourdieusian terms I was using an 'objectifying gaze' (Grenfell 2015 n.d.) that was judgemental because the other person's mode of speaking and opinions clashed with my own evolved subject position. I spent many months struggling with my bias, re-reading and re-analysing the data. I built additional context through considering formational habitus including geography and class, looking at historical economic conditions, world and localised events. Gradually, I came to an understanding of why that person felt the way they did and why those feelings were expressed in the way they were. This process of immersion enabled me to be more reflexive and balanced in my interpretation.

In another case, when I listened back to the recording, I realised that I had directed one of the final questions in the interview section towards an issue that was of personal concern to me but not necessarily to the participant. The question was drawn from their narrative but I had been too keen to interject and make personal comparisons in the way their employer had reacted to a specific government policy and the way mine had. My personal interest had become too dominant. I decided to cut this final part of the recording out of the transcript as I felt I had biased that part of the data.

## 4.7 Post-data collection stage evaluation of implementation

### 4.7.1 Evaluation of career map

I had originally planned that this would be completely separate event to the subsequent taking of the narrative, but the piloting of the approach showed that it was preferable for the two stages to run together. The application of the semi-standardised format used in this part of the research was intended to start the participant talking uninterrupted through the shared creation of a field artefact in preparation for the next stage of interaction. The artefact itself was vital in interpreting the subsequent stages of the data. An example of a participant career map can be seen in the appendix.

The implementation of creating the career maps was complicated by the pandemic conditions requiring physical distance. For each participant, this stage of the data collection transpired slightly differently. My plan to co-create the career map with the participants using my own career map as an example, was complicated by health and safety rules that forbade passing pieces of paper between people. On-line, showing hand-drawn artefacts to the participants via a camera, also lost the desired impact. I was able to take a career timeline from all the participants.

However, I had to adjust how I did it in the moment. For some, I wrote it down as they spoke and then returned to it at the end to fill in any missing parts and check with them that it was correct. For others, it followed my original plan more closely.

The career map did prove to be an important thinking tool for the participants.

Several people were very unclear on the dates of career moves and events.

Talking through the career map helped them to pinpoint time which helped me considerably when it came to asking questions at the interview stage and analysing

the data. I was able to match up their personal timeline with the timeline of further education to contextualise their narratives.

I included demographic questions as part of the career map which were useful in locating the participants within social fields over time. However, in retrospect, I wish I had been more forthright and asked questions directly about salary. This would have been useful in making direct comparisons between the men and women.

#### 4.7.2 Evaluation of autobiographical narrative

The second stage required limited interaction with the interviewer to give maximum 'listening' space to the participants. Goodson (2018) advises that when an interviewer interrupts to ask questions the participant is being cut off from their thought process. From his experience collecting autobiographical narratives, he has found that: '...the more questions you ask, the less you learn' (Goodson 2018 13'20"). Goodson (2018) describes how he turned away from using a 72-point prompt sheet to elicit autobiographical accounts towards using the simple request; 'Tell me about your life in teaching' (Goodson 2018). 'Tell me about your life in teaching' was therefore used as a generative question as a single prompt for all of the narratives.

However, I considered it important to maintain my interviewer 'presence' and show I was actively listening during the production of the narrative, even if it was over an internet link. Learning from the pre-pilot self-tests showed that speaking only to a recording device limits the length and depth of the narrative. In order to generate a flowing narrative which shows what Goodson (2013) refers to as having 'thematic density', I felt it necessary to provide encouragement in the form of nods, note-taking and affirming sounds to show I was listening. I also followed the guidance of

Frank (2010) in waiting for the interviewee to indicate they have finished. There was always a phrase that showed that the narration was complete.

Once the narration was complete, I had the opportunity to ask any clarification questions. I took care to only ask questions that drew on areas already mentioned by them or related to sectoral issues. I was mindful that gaps or areas not fully explored, represent an active choice which are also giving information (Goodson 2018). In practice, it was readily apparent where participants had intentionally omitted parts of their career or events that they felt uncomfortable with. In the moment it seemed disrespectful to probe areas that the participant did not want to explore or clearly found upsetting. Other areas that were lightly explored or totally ignored only revealed themselves later during the analysis of the texts.

On reflection, I felt my decision not to ask elaboration questions about gaps in the narrative was correct. The gaps allowed me to explore the participants' underpinning self-image. Looking for what was not said whether as a conscious choice or an unconscious omission became part of the analysis. Asking for elaboration at the narrative stage would have eliminated the opportunity for interpretation that could happen around these choices. I was then able to explore anything that was obviously missing at the next stage of the process.

#### 4.7.3 Evaluation of working-life history interview

Generating questions for the interview was an area I initially struggled with. Flick (2018 p.228) suggests producing 'hypothesis directed questions'. For this study there is no hypothesis but the interview was an opportunity to ask people directly about their conceptions of the sector and establish a context connected to the sub questions. Flick suggests a semi-standardised technique using 'confrontational

questions' to test out the strength of the participants' belief in concepts. He calls this a 'dialogue between positions' which challenges the participant to clarify their thoughts (Flick 2018 p.231).

I decided against Flick's semi-standardised format for the interviews as the pilot study showed me that I needed to be able to ask questions based on the individual narrative, the content of which could not be predicted beforehand. Therefore, questions in the style of: 'Could you tell me about ...' were used as prompts to introduce a question related theme without giving direction.

To create the questions, I made notes as I was listening to the narrative to help me. I had the notes taken from the first stage of the participants' career map beside me and also a timeline of events in further education which focused the creation of questions. I asked open questions about what the participants were most proud of in their career or picked up on something they had spoken about to ask why this was important to them. This proved to be particularly useful as the participant's choice gave them the opportunity of 'autobiographical self-thematisation' (Kelchtermans and Ballet 2002 p.108) in explaining why they were proud of a particular achievement. What they said was an insight to their personal motivations and did produce valuable evidence about how and why they had remained in further education to become a Veteran.

#### 4.7.4 Evaluation of recruitment

The only problem I encountered with recruitment was in the eventual withdrawal of the originally planned sixth participant. The person I had originally approached to be the sixth participant was someone who worked in a specialist college. My recruitment plan foundered at that stage. The eventual sixth participant was another person from GFE. Although GFE is over-represented in the sample, the

range of experience that the participants had did allow for view across further education as several of the participants had moved in and out of different types of provision across the period of their careers.

Losing the original participant six did mean that my sample was lacking someone from the 'Specialist' sector (meaning separate provision exclusively catering for special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) although some of the participants had worked with SEND learners within other settings. Land-based provision (meaning institutions which concentrate of subject groupings of agriculture and horticulture) were also not represented in this group of participants. I did, however, gain people who taught higher education within further education settings and pre-16 which were not variations of provision I had previously considered.

#### 4.7.5 Evaluation of Ethical Reflexivity

I was disappointed in the level of 'alongsider' approach that was achieved (Clandinin and Connelly 2000, Chalachanová *et al* 2020). I had hoped for greater interaction with the participants in the post-data collection period. Only two of the participants continued to have contact to an extent where I could evaluate the impact that participation had had on them. For those two I was able to see that participation had a positive impact. Amy had reflected on her pension position and had taken steps to better understand her options and increase her retirement savings.

Mike had perhaps the most profound reaction to taking part in the study. The reflective exercise brought him to a decision that he wanted to re-start a course that he was particularly attached to. He had to obtain funding from local schools but managed to achieve his aim. The reflection also prompted him to start to write a

book about his experiences as a disaffected teenager (see 5.1.7). Even those two made little or no response to the sharing of both the transcribed text of their verbal contributions and the final (previous version) text of the study. I emailed all the participants a transcript of everything that they said to give the opportunity to disagree with the text if they felt that I had either misheard, mis-transcribed or if they felt that having read what they said, that was not really what they wanted to say. It was possible for the participants to make corrections and additions in the way of clarification at this point, although none of the participants took this opportunity.

#### 4.7.6 Evaluation of the data analysis

##### The career map

The timelines of the participants' careers were examined in line with the intentions described in 4.5.2. I was able to easily see the Veterans' position within the field (Bourdieu 1984) of further education from job titles and the way the participants described those jobs. It was also immediately obvious if and how the participants had moved around through different types of provision or had moved geographically. For people who had moved around, I was able to start to draw out ideas about further education as a field and the boundaries of that field from the practitioner perspective.

Although I did not draw any specific conclusions directly from the career map data, it allowed me to add useful context for interpretation of the subsequent stages of data analysis in terms of contemporary further education, policy, funding and audit regimes when matching career events with sectoral changes.

For the participants who did not follow a linear narrative style, the career map timeline was very useful in determining which stage of their career they were referring to and setting the smaller stories into context.

The data analysis was conducted in several stages. Initially, the autobiographical narratives were split up into smaller stories such as recalling a redundancy.

Bamberg (2012) advises that when analysing narratives, the researcher should look for both the small stories and the big stories that participants include. He believes that the smaller incidental recollections reveal the construction of their identity through both from the choice of incident and how they portray their role within it. Their big stories tell you how the narrator sees the world. For this study, both elements are relevant. Incidental stories within the narrative were separated out to examine what could be gleaned about professional identity, how they interpreted the ethics of their practice and how they operated their everyday agency to fit their personal professional ethics. The bigger stories were examined for what they revealed about the participant's interaction with the structural and institutional elements of their careers.

I created a template for breaking down the narrative incidents into small stories and big stories in order to facilitate a first stage analysis. An example of the template and how it was used can be found in Appendix A. The template is an amalgamation of my reading of work by Labov (1982), Riessman (2005) and Frank (2010). The template breaks the initial analysis of the sub-stories into first, an 'Abstract' where I defined the theme of the sub-story in a reflexive manner, drawing on my knowledge of the further education sector interpreted why the sub story and tried to interpret on why the sub-story had been chosen. Then I moved onto 'Orientation', where I defined the practical elements such as at what stage of the participant's career this

incident had taken place and who else was involved. 'Complicating action' involved me looking at the text to decide what was being celebrated or feared or who the aggressor or ally was in the story. The 'Evaluation' of the sub-story allowed me to draw out the meaning or what was the participant's point. 'Resolution' led me to analyse whether the story reached any conclusions. The final category 'Coda' looked for how the participant indicated that they had finished the story. I found that some of the categories overlapped but the template and categories were a useful thinking tool for drawing out themes from the narratives.

The analysis was both of what was said and the way it was said. The second stage of analysis was to look at the narrative as a whole. This study is primarily, research 'with' narrative rather than research 'on' narrative (Bamberg 2012 p.77). However, the way the narrative was constructed by the participant was considered as significant. Goodson (2013 p.68) categorises how the narrative is created suggesting that the elaborative style involves greater reflection and rehearsal on the part of the narrator. The story has been thought over and created into a linear narrative that serves the person's underlying concern rather than just being a series of events. They have created their story to tell their listener about what they consider important. Events will have been picked out to illustrate that important thread.

I found the way the participants told their stories to be highly individual. Linear narratives and more meandering narrative styles were both present. In some cases, returning to a theme showed the importance of that theme. Some people chose not to elaborate on painful experiences, whilst others chose to explore them in depth. I did not interpret the length and depth of the explanation to indicate the depth of feeling associated with the memory. Rather, I felt it was an indication of

the way that person chose to speak about that pain on the day of the interaction. I was able to use contemporaneous notes that I had made regarding visual body-language cues as well as verbal tone to assist the interpretation of the emotion attached to the memories.

#### Worklife interview

A third stage of analysis of the narrative was to examine the narrative alongside the interview answers. Initially, I created another template using Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine's (2017) work, to draw out phrases or incidents that aligned with doxic beliefs or dominant discourses. However, I quickly realised that using a grid template to look for the Veterans' pre-reflexive or even reflexive understandings that are being searched for in this study would not work. Subsequently, I went back to the transcripts and looked more holistically at how each participant had negotiated the power structures of their working lives.

Because the interview questions were largely drawn directly from the narratives, the answers provided useful additional evidence. The Veterans took the opportunity to explore more deeply the areas that mattered to them. When analysing these elements I took Ball's guidance in analysing the transcripts to search for the 'structures and rules that constitute a discourse' (Ball 2012 p.20). This is not taken to mean that key phrases and repeated themes should not be sought out but rather that a further step must be added to look for the beliefs, limitations, controlling structures and rules that have influenced the choice of theme and phrases. I looked for what the participants felt was valuable, what made them angry and what was not worth mentioning.

For the majority of the participants, their self-formative acts and underpinning beliefs were easy to recognise and were presented to me openly. The way the participants explained the choices they had made often showed the limitations on their agency through practical structured elements of the field or through the limits of their own evolved disposition.

#### 4.7.7 Evaluation of the Trustworthiness of the data

The concept of 'confirmability' (Lincoln and Guba 1985 p.318) requires the researcher to keep an audit trail of all data and interpretations. Flick (2018 p.543) agrees that within a narrative approach, researchers are required to keep data in such a way that claims can be checked by an external party such as the university. I therefore kept the original transcripts.

The career map artefact was checked by the participant and agreed at the time of collection. A transcript of the narrative and interview was emailed to each participant for agreement. Most replied to say that everything was correct. One participant: 'M' did not reply. Lincoln and Guba's (1985) advice that building a prolonged rapport with the participants could increase the trustworthiness or credibility of the data collected was noted but for some of the more geographically distant participants, I had no further face-to-face contact. I would not however, consider that the lack of prolonged interaction would mean that the participant gave any false or misleading information. I was satisfied that they told their own truth.

The three-stage design of the data generation was successful in allowing for cross-referencing of events. As previously stated, the intention was not to catch falsehoods but to broaden context and add personal depth which added to the trustworthiness of the data.

## Chapter 5: Findings

### 5.1 Introduction to the participants

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the participants and the data collected to the reader and give context for the thematization of their experiences. In the table below I share the range of experience of the six participants across the different types of employers in further education. The table represents a collation of data from the career maps.

Figure 2: Further education provision types that the participants have worked in

| Provision Types                                             | Number of participants who have worked in that provision at some point |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| General Further Education College                           | 6                                                                      |
| Community/Local Authority                                   | 3                                                                      |
| Charity                                                     | 2                                                                      |
| Prison/Probation                                            | 2                                                                      |
| Work-based learning/apprenticeships                         | 3                                                                      |
| Specialist provision e.g. land based or SEND only provision | 0                                                                      |
| Independent Training Provider/Alternative provision         | 2                                                                      |
| School 6th-form                                             | 1                                                                      |
| HE in FE                                                    | 2                                                                      |

All six had worked in general further education (GFE) at some point but four of the participants had moved around the sector into different types of provision during their careers. I have included school sixth form, as although this is outside of further education, it does show that movement between educational sectors was part of their career experience. The Veterans' ability to move around different types

of further education does begin to suggest that there are underlying field characteristics, something that is explored further in Theme 4.

#### 5.1.1 The participants' characteristics

Three men and three women took part in my study. I did not ask participants if they were cis gender or not, I also did not ask about sexuality. My reasoning was that if they felt it was relevant to their experience, they would share the information.

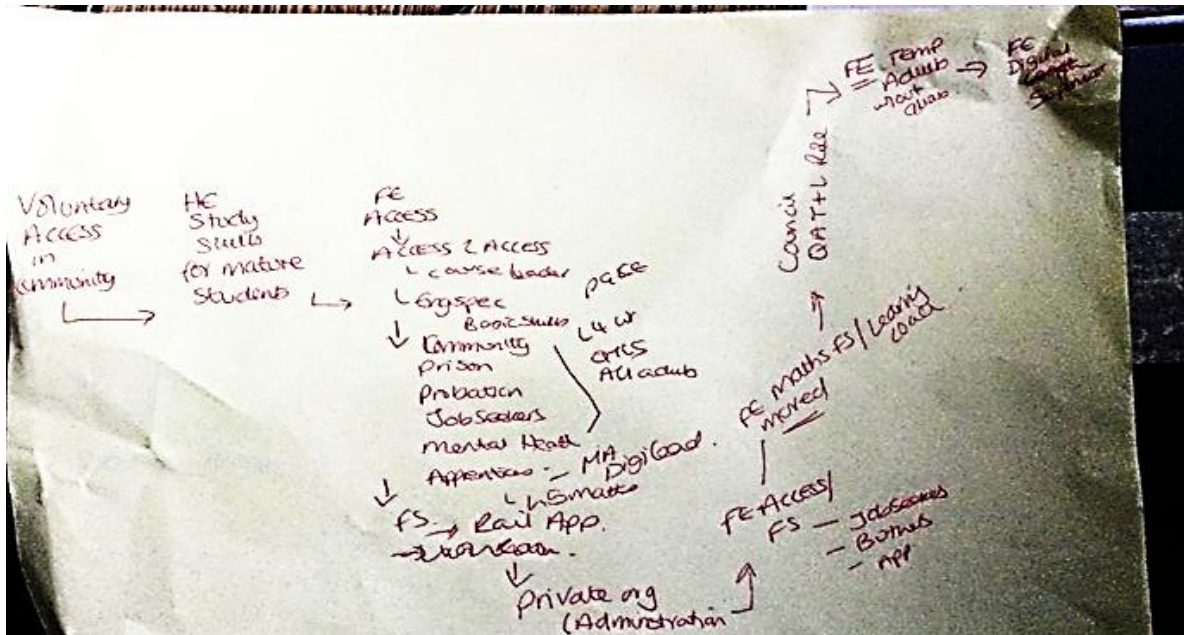
Five of the participants identified as white British. One of these emphasised a separate Scottish ethnic identity (M). One participant identified a black British identity (Wendy).

As highlighted in 3.2.6 and 7, social class is a contested area. As education professionals, the participants would at the time of interview, fall into the broad category of the middle classes (ONS 2021). However, for this study I am more interested in their class origins. All of the participants spoke openly about their upbringing which led me to the categorisation of all six as having working class backgrounds. However, there was no homogeneity in the cultural socialisation that they had experienced. Five of the six participants had left school at 16 or before, (Amy, M, Sam, Mike and Donna) only one (Wendy) had carried on to the age of 18 and entered the workforce at that point.

None of the participants shared information regarding disability or long-term illness that would fit into a disability category. The ages of the participants ranged from 52-64 years, equally distributed with two in each of the categories 50-55, 56-60, 61-65.

### 5.1.2 Participant 1 – Amy

Figure 3 – Participant 1 Career map



The career map (written by Amy) revealed that Amy had been an English and maths teacher but at the time of participation she was coaching teachers with their digital skills. She started her further education career in 1997 or 98 which means she had been in further education for around 25 years at the time of telling her story. The process of constructing the career map (above) in our first meeting brought back some emotive memories. Amy told me about her family background. She grew up in social housing with a large but unhappy family who did not place a high value on education. She had left school at 15 with no qualifications and had a series of jobs in retail. She had come to her own education as a mature student through an Access to Higher Education course at her local further education college and proceeded to university with the intention of becoming a social worker. She felt that decision changed the direction of her life positively but also resulted in distancing her from her family. Amy shared the highly personal motivations for

geographical moves around the country. The emotion attached to recalling life events around her career resulted in the curtailment of the first recording.

In the narrative section of the data collection, Amy spoke often emotionally about her career. Emotive memories came partly from professional situations but also from personal life events that were tied in time and in her memory. Sometimes the life events impacted on the professional sphere but overall the personal aspects that she shared have been left out of the data.

Her further education career had taken her around the UK and through more areas of the sector than any of the participants. She told me about eight employers but within that, there were a wide variety of settings. Amy had worked in colleges, private providers, community, prison and charity provision. Amy's spoke with enthusiasm about her 'favourite' jobs and how she had found her 'niche'.

However, a pattern emerged where each high point she experienced seemed to be mirrored by a low point such as redundancy.

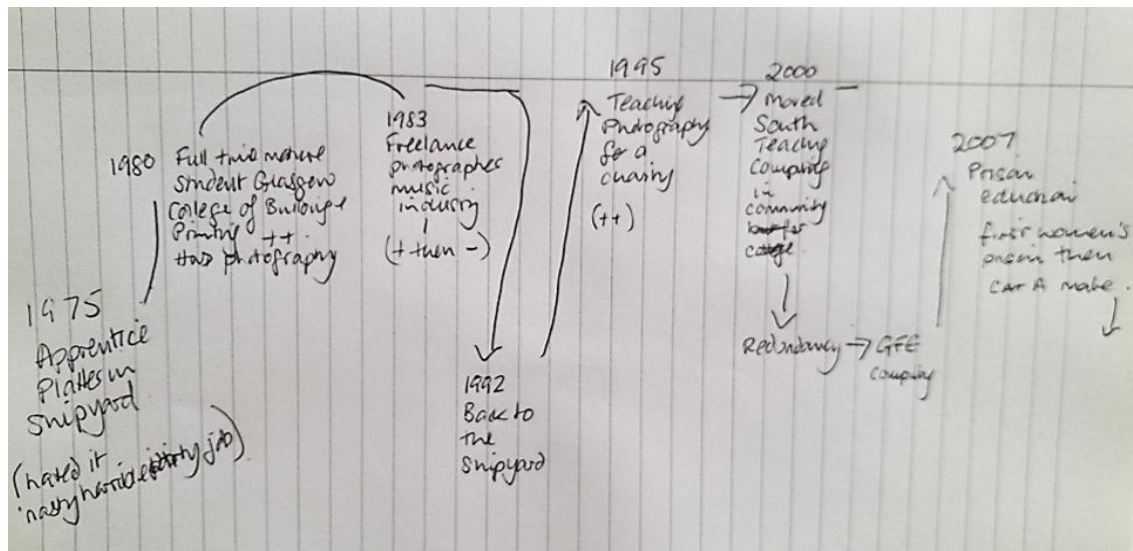
She told her story in a largely linear fashion with a few non-linear additions to amplify points she was trying to make. Parts of the narrative were more fleshed-out than others. The more elaborated sections were ones with emotional resonances. The longest section is one where she was most upset. I ensured that I checked on consent when she was distressed to ensure she was happy to continue.

The protracted nature of the interactions proved useful for the data gathering as by the time of the last interview I was able to ask Amy about themes that had emerged from other participants as well as the themes from her own narrative. For example, in the interview she reinforced her earlier theme around how passionate she felt about the importance of access to education for mature students. I was also able to

raise the issue of retirement with her, which had shown as a theme in the narratives of other participants, and found that her complicated career pathway had impacted her financial wellbeing (see 6.7). Together, Amy's three data sets created the impression of a career that has been a struggle, eventually resulting in a decision to step away from teaching into a supporting role in further education. Issues of precarity of employment conditions and how Amy's sought to counter these informed all of the themes below.

### 5.1.3 Participant 2 - M.

Figure 4 – Participant 2 Career map



Participant 2 chose the pseudonym Marmite, after his cat. I will call him M here.

The conversation about the career map exercise (above written by through collaboration) revealed that he identified as male, white Scottish and 63 years old.

M had left school at 16 to become a plater in a shipyard which he hated and described as a 'nasty, horrible, dirty job.' He returned later (age unspecified) to education to study photography to HND level at his local college and became a music industry photographer. 'It sounds exciting but it all becomes very dull in the end because it's the late nights, processing the film at night to be sent out in the

morning.’ He turned to teaching when his second career impacted on his health; ‘I did start to go a bit deaf from that’ (M career map conversation).

M had taught in further education for 26 years across the UK. His subject areas had been first photography and latterly computing. At the time of interview, he was teaching computing in a male Category A maximum security prison in England.

Due to COVID restrictions, all the data gathering took place over video conferencing during the evening. The data gathering approach did not work quite as planned. I asked M to explain the timeline of his career so that I could create the career map and show it to him on the screen. In an unplanned way, the career map conversation at the start became expansive and turned into his narration.

Once he had started narrating, I did not want to interrupt. I thought it less disruptive of his train of thought. M did need prompting a little to continue at one point but eventually spoke for just under an hour. His narrative was more thematic than linear and often used the device of reported conversation to illustrate anecdotes around a theme. For example, when trying to explain the pressures of his job he voiced his manager’s accusations on reasons for the prisoners not passing computing qualifications, ‘you aren’t doing it properly if you didn’t get them through’ as a frame for giving his counter view of ‘I told you at the beginning those boys won’t pass, you wouldn’t listen to me’ (M narrative section 10). This style characterised M’s narration. Although M did narrate the detail about the stages of his career, the majority of his narrative was given over to his current role.

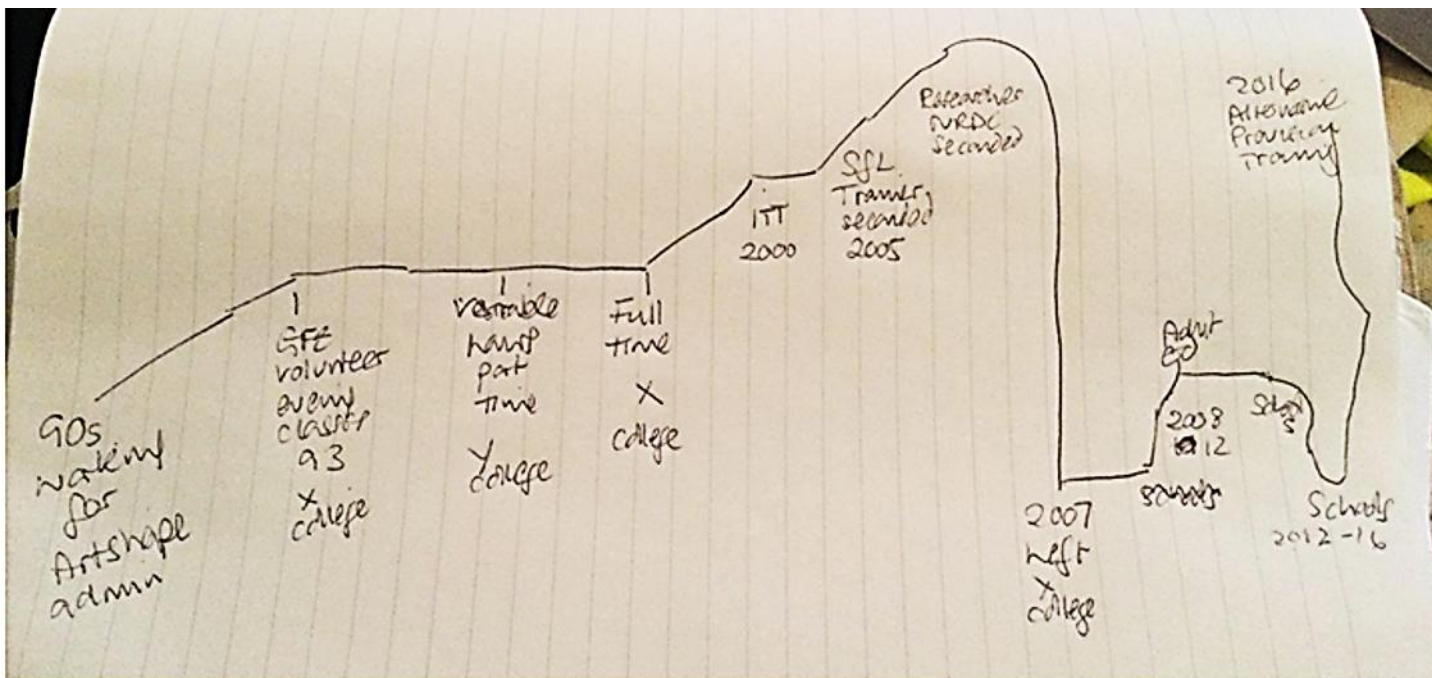
The interview stage allowed M to explore issues that were problematic for him particularly around the prison environment and the ‘inertia’ that he felt existed

there. M expressed his views on themes ranging from government policies he regarded as ineffective or irrelevant to the frustration with the prison stores.

Taken together, M's data reinforced an impression of frustration but also of career influenced by precarity and fear of precarity which is discussed further in Themes 3 and 4. M was the first participant to raise issues of retirement which prompted Theme 5.

#### 5.1.4 Participant 3 – Donna

Figure 5 – Participant 3 Career map



Participant 3 chose the pseudonym 'Donna'. The initial data collection around the career map (created collaboratively in person) seen above, revealed that Donna was a white British female age 61. She categorised herself as working class. She left school at 16. Donna did not speak about her background childhood or schooling. She did, however, speak about having moved around the country and described how moving to a new area and having a child had prompted her to want

to change her life. An Open University degree had been her first step in that change, followed by teaching.

At the second stage of data collection, Donna gave a fleshed-out narrative that was largely linear in time; there were a few loops back to emphasise a point such as the protracted start to her career which is discussed in Theme 1. She used many examples, often humorous, from her career to illustrate her narrative. For example, Donna included an amusing story about being asked to remove learners' nail varnish (see page 229 for quote) but there was always a clear point to the inclusion.

The third stage, working-life interview picked-up on themes from the narrative and added detail particularly around the impact of governmental policies over the span of her career such as Skills for Life. Donna also brought up new themes around issues that she felt strongly about such the expectations placed on further education:

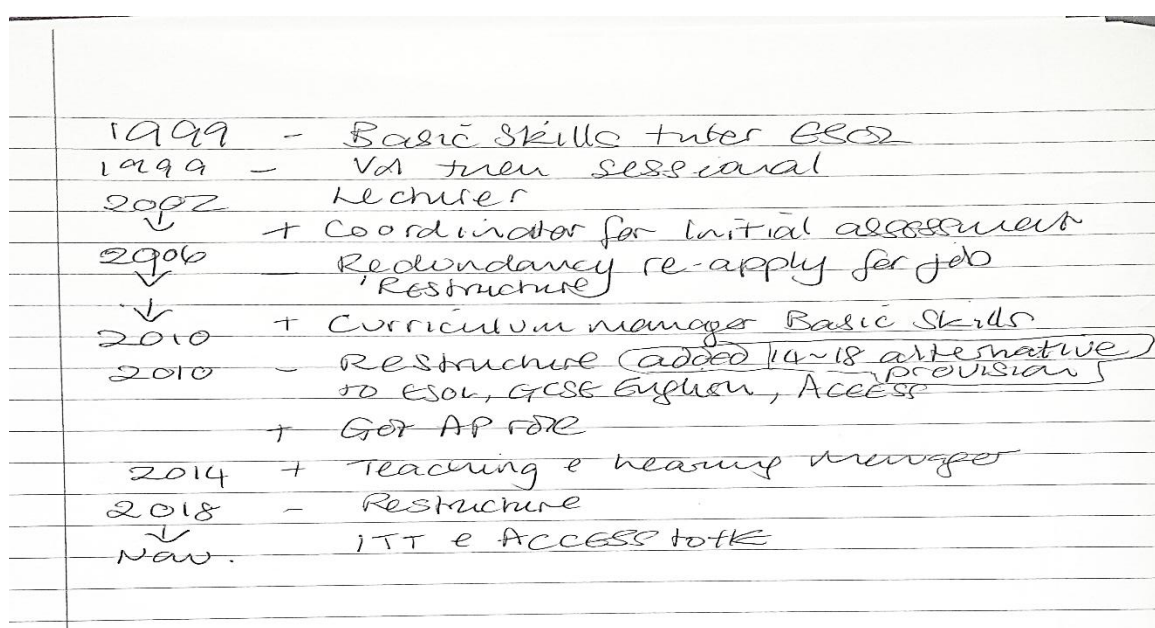
so that's the thing with FE, you've got a much bigger challenge. You've got all these kids who have not done very well in school then suddenly in a year you are supposed to get them all these qualifications that they didn't get in school when they were there for five years. It's funny isn't it? Less resources, less time...you know they get an hour a day of maths at school, with us they get an hour a week not an hour a day and you are suddenly meant to turn all of this around!

The third stage of the data collection was particularly useful in allowing Donna to be expansive on her opinions about further education in general and how she saw her own role.

Donna's data portrayed a career spread across the further education sector and gave interesting insights into what separates further education from other types of provision. Her contributions have featured in all of the themes in Chapter 6 but it is perhaps in the theme around professional identity that her data was most revealing about what keeps people working in further education.

#### 5.1.5 Participant 4 – Wendy

Figure 6 – Participant 4 Career Map



The career map (above, taken down by me over video conferencing) and discussion revealed that Participant 4 had been teaching in further education for 22 years at the time of interview. She was a black female in her 50s. She did not choose a pseudonym, so I have given her the name Wendy. Wendy had taught English and social work but at the time of interview was teaching teacher training. Wendy included useful information about her background and work history prior to entering teaching. Wendy had had one employer in general further education for the whole of her career but had moved through numerous roles and had taught in

various subject areas including ESOL, social work and teacher training. She had also had a variety of management roles.

The interaction took place over video conferencing during an evening. The method did not run entirely to plan. When talking through the timeline, she had already started to expansively narrate so there became an extra section of 'Timeline Conversation'. This was given in a linear structure as it was attached to dates and contained some of the most revealing parts of our interaction. For example, it was at this early stage that Wendy spoke about an incident that occurred in 2018 when she felt she had been subject to racial discrimination (this incident is explored in Theme 5).

Once the career map/timeline conversation concluded, the open narrative began again in response to the request: 'Tell me about your life in teaching'. Wendy went back to before she started teaching to explain why she was prompted to consider further education teaching as a career and how she went about entry (this is discussed in Theme 1). Wendy used narrative arcs of smaller complete stories such as beginning to teach with illustrations to make points around the difficulties she had encountered throughout her career and how she overcame them.

The final part of the data collection allowed Wendy to clearly indicate where she felt her personal achievements lay and what continued to motivate her. For example, she selected teaching and managing the Access to Higher Education course as a particular point of professional pride.

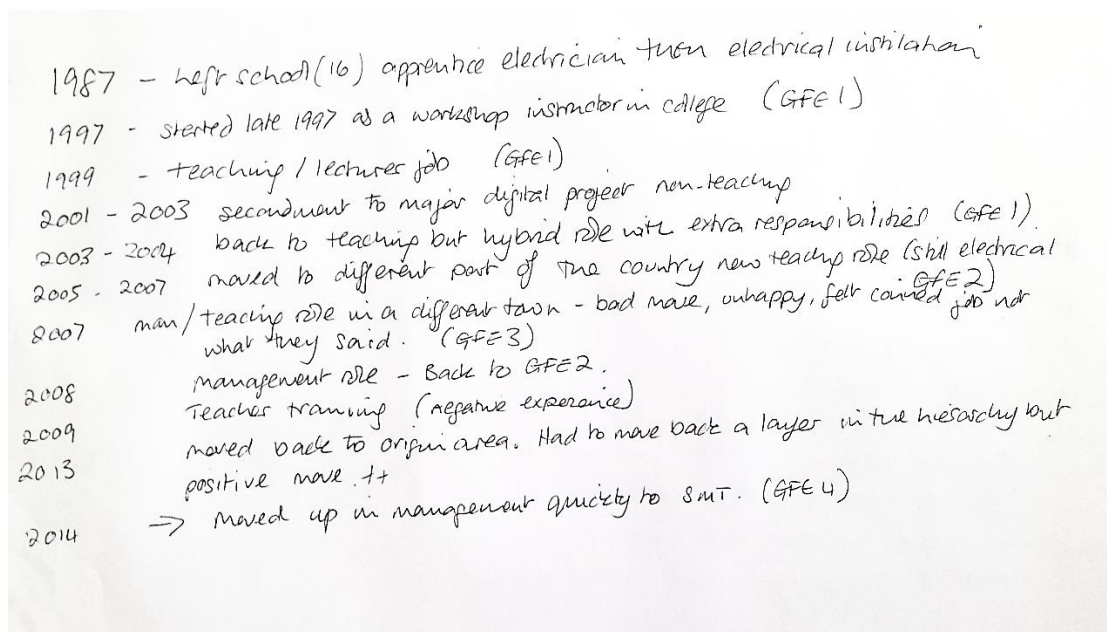
You know when we had that restructure and Access came under my remit, they had had a success rate of 25% the year before and 36% the year it came to me. But in that first year we had 2nd year students who were

coming back and not many returned. So in my first year, accounting for that 2nd year cohort, we got it up to 66%. Then by the end of our 2nd year we, this new team, we had got it into the high 80s. Then we have consistently been high 80s to mid 90s (Wendy work-life interview).

The three data sets present a rather contradictory impression of a career that is, from an initial perspective, characterized by the stability of one GFE employer and progression through the hierarchy. However, the narrative revealed a career beset by precarity of employment and decision-making influenced by precarity. The issues Wendy experienced have been explored further in Themes 1, 2, and 4.

#### 5.1.6 Participant 5 - Sam

Figure 7 – Participant 5 Career map



The first data set of career map was written by me but created collaborate online.

The conversation around that exercise, revealed that Sam was a white working-class male in his early 50s who had been a practitioner in further education for nearly 25 years. Sam said that he 'dropped out of school' at 16 'so no GCSEs' He

had been 'lucky' to get an apprenticeship as an electrician through a 'family friend' (Sam career map conversation). Sam had a background in teaching electrical. He had spent his entire career in general further education colleges, moving between four employers. Although there were only four different colleges, he had worked in multiple different roles making his way up the hierarchy.

His autobiographical narrative displayed a career of rising progression. He listed the range of roles he had worked in;

lecturer, assessor, advanced practitioner, curriculum manager, curriculum quality manager, head of centre, head of cluster and I am currently director of faculty (Sam Narrative section 4).

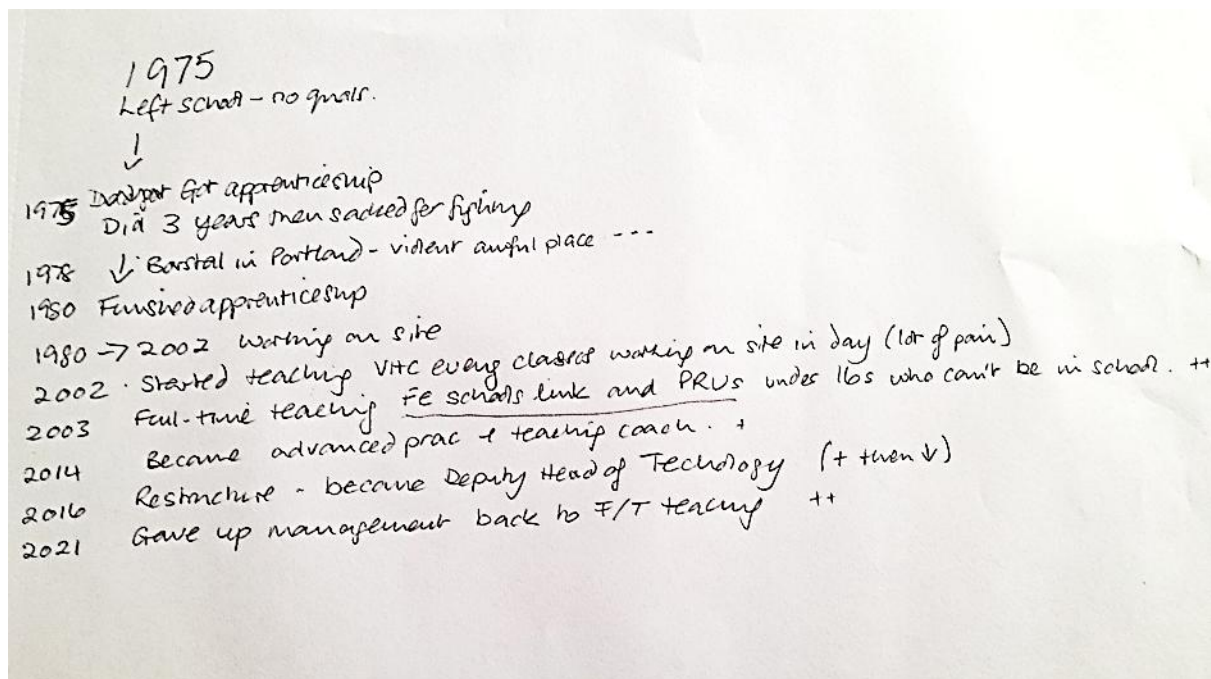
However, his narrative showed that his advancement had not been without encountering difficulties. The barriers he encountered at the start of his career are explored in Theme 1 and his experiences of career precarity feed into Theme 4.

During the working-life interview Sam admitted that he found talking about himself like this quite difficult saying, 'I am talking now but I am quite a quiet person, I like sitting and listening to people' (Work-life interview Q.6.). The interview took place via video conferencing in the early evening of a working day. Sam was still in his office and was perhaps still immersed in his day-to-day concerns which may have influenced his thought processes, particularly at the start of our meeting. However, at this final stage he felt able to speak more expansively about impersonal issues that were impacting further education at the time. He gave his perspective on governmental policies such as curriculum changes but also valuable insights on the impact of Covid on his college.

Sam's three data sets provided insights into what is valued in further education. I was particularly interested in the elements that had facilitated his career progression. His data has contributed to the discussion of qualifications, professional identity and sustaining a career.

### 5.1.7 Participant 6 – Mike

Figure 8 – Participant 6 Career map



Mike was a white male and the oldest of the participants at 64 and also the oldest when he started teaching at 44. Mike's career map was created collaboratively after the other stages of data collection because he began his narrative straight away. Mike was intent that I should understand his background as a framing for his career. He identified as having a working class background but grew up in a very low income family with unstable parenting. He shared a lot of detail about his own difficult childhood and youth, including a very painful period of his life when he was incarcerated in a notoriously violent young offenders' institution.

I was a bit of a git when I was younger, got into a few scrapes, got arrested three Fridays on the bounce before I went inside.

The detail of his incarceration and rebuilding of his life after release has not been included in the data used for the study because it might be identifiable, but it was important in building my understanding of his motivation. Mike was proud of these elements of his life framing the rebuilding as redemptive.

The shape of Mike's career was revealed through his narrative and his later career map. He had left school at 15 and had served an apprenticeship. At the time of interview, he had been in further education for 20 years. He had spent his career in general further education but had spent significant periods of time working with pupil referral unit learners (PRU) under 16. He spoke at length about this period of his teaching career recalling, 'I would sit and look across the table at them and see yourself...just some young raggy-assed kid like, trying to get by somehow' (Mike Narrative section 5). The data he shared on this subject has been explored further in Theme 3: Professional Identity.

In the final interview, Mike was reluctant to speak about government policies but focused again on his work with pupil referral unit learners. He did however speak about his experiences of teacher training which contribute to Theme 2:

Qualification. In response to questions he spoke openly about his retirement plans and this data has been discussed in Theme 5.

Mike's three sets of data reinforced the initial image of someone whose career has been fuelled by a personal agenda.

#### 5.1.8 Summary of Findings

All of the participants narrated the story of their working lives chronologically by starting at the beginning and working through to present day and the future.

Although the narratives are essentially individual, each of the six participants spoke unprompted about how they began their career and established themselves. The early stages of their careers and the process of training took up substantial proportions of the narratives and were obviously important to the participants in how they understood the 'rules of the game' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) for their careers and how they began to establish their personal ethical stance. All of the participants spoke about how they had passed through difficulties and all narrated their ideas about their future.

From the data I have drawn out the following themes;

Theme 1 looks at the difficulties the participants faced in entering their careers as further education teachers and how that might relate to their longevity.

Theme 2 examines the motif of qualification; what that means to the participants as individuals and their careers. I did not directly ask the participants about their qualifications but all of the participants spoke on this issue. For some participants, it was shown to be important for unexpected reasons which prompts deeper investigation.

Theme 3 explores the professional identities of the participants and how the personal meaning attached to their role underpins why they have persisted in their further education careers to reach a longevity of 20 years or more.

Theme 4 examines how they have conquered the many challenges they have faced in maintaining their careers. Issues of precarity emerged from the data in various guises. The career map data show the definite pathway deflections that the

participants sometimes made due to precarious employment conditions but the narratives allow an analysis of the more subtle impacts.

Theme 5 takes the participants into a more forward-looking mode to examine how they see the ends of their careers.

## Chapter 6: Analysis and Discussion

### 6.1 Introduction to the data themes

The examination of the themes drawn out in this chapter is structured in a chronology that reflects the participants' narratives of their careers.

The personal events revealed in the data have been examined within the historical policy context of further education to try and understand the localised impact of national decisions. The themes address the main questions that this study sought to answer about *why* the participants have persisted in their careers to become a 'Veteran' in further education and *how* they have managed to do that. In this chapter, I start to apply theoretical ideas to the narratives of the participants.

### 6.2 Theme 1: Beginnings

Office of National Statistics figures show that 21% of new further education teachers leave the profession in less than one year. This compares to 18% for secondary school teachers and rates in the bottom three for public sector workers (ONS 2019). As mentioned in the Context chapter, figures differ but between 12% (SIR 26 2019 p.24) and 40% (Education Policy Institute 2020) will leave in the first five years. Therefore, interrogating the data to find out whether there is anything about this first stage of these Veteran practitioners' teaching careers that influenced their longevity seems vital. Day and Sammons' (2006) work on teacher career stages suggested that the first phase of gaining efficacy and identity in the classroom covers the first four years of a teachers' career. This section examines that first four years (approximately) of the participants' experience. Similarities and differences in their experiences will be examined to ascertain the impact on the individuals and their careers.

As previously mentioned, in contrast to the schools' sector, there are a variety of ways to enter further education teaching. Some may have gone through university training prior to being employed, but others will have been recruited straight from industry and started in a classroom with little or no initial teacher training. Gleeson *et al* (2015) warn that there may be no shared experience of starting as a further education practitioner. The lack of any conventional entry point immediately indicates complexity around the 'rules of the game' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p.168) for the field of further education teaching. Knowing where or how to start is the first barrier to be surmounted. For the Veterans it seemed that there was no 'conventional' way to start but there were some commonalities of experience.

It was notable that the Veterans' experiences did not match those of early career further education practitioners reflected in the literature such as the work of Bathmaker and Avis (2005, 2013). This may be because Bathmaker and Avis were largely drawing on their own former university-based ITT students as participants. My group were aged between 27 and 40 at the start of their careers and all had had previous jobs. For some, they were 'jobs that were just jobs' (Wendy Narrative Section 1) but others: Sam, Mike, Donna and M left jobs that were paying their bills. Four of the six already had caring responsibilities for children at the time of their career change to teaching. Their lives did not allow them the option of taking a full-time university course, so their routes into teaching were more complicated. Five of the six Veterans spoke about the difficulties they had experienced securing a full teaching role. Issues of the precarity of zero-hours contracts, building professional recognition and roles that are not designated as 'teaching' all emerged from the narratives.

I have separated the women and the men for this section of the data analysis because there were distinct experiences for the two groups. As was shown in the Context chapter, women staff do outnumber men in further education. 62% of employees are women but the difference between male and female teachers is a lot closer with only just over half of teachers being female (ETF 2020b p.48). The gendered differences found in the data around the experience of starting to teach in further education, could be coincidental as there is such a small sample of participants. However, in their accounts I started to perceive a gender difference in the unspoken rules of the field (Bourdieu 2010) in this environment.

#### 6.2.1 The women

The women of the group, unlike the men, were all teaching non-vocational subjects, English, maths and ESOL, the significance of which I will discuss later. There were shared features in their life stages. All three had small children at the time of starting their further education careers. However, the most surprising theme in the data was that the women also shared a common experience when starting in further education in that they all started their careers by doing unpaid work.

In the literature review, I explored Bathmaker's (2015) theory of the 'porous' and 'ill-defined' field boundaries of further education, where further and higher education may overlap or merge. A similar observation may be made about the women's experiences of starting to work in unpaid in further education. They show that the boundaries of what 'working' in the field of further education is can also be ill-defined and 'porous' (Bathmaker 2015 p.68).

Donna explains here how she began voluntary teaching.

I had always been quite interested in the idea of teaching and when I had contacted the teacher training places they said 'you've got to get some experience' and because I was working, I had an admin job, I couldn't go into a school, so I started as a volunteer in FE evening classes (Donna Narrative Section 1).

Amy similarly began with volunteering but in a women's refuge.

I did a degree in social science and when I finished that I wanted to do outreach work for women and during the degree someone from outreach had come in and I went to see her and said I'd like to do some voluntary work and work experience. And I ended up working with some outreach people in the community where they were doing like an Access to Access course [a Level 2 course aimed at people who intend to progress to Level 3 Access to Higher Education] (Amy Narrative Section 1).

Wendy was slightly different in that she was prompted to find voluntary work experience by doing a part-time initial teacher training course.

I had done the 7307 and whilst I was on that I had to get some work experience, so I went to X College because that was where I had done my 7307 and the manager of Basic Skills at the time gave me the hours (Wendy Narrative Section 1).

The women were working in privately organised volunteering positions rather than the more familiar PGCE placements, without contracts or time limits but their work was significant both to them and to the organisations. The absence of payment officially excludes these time periods within their careers as counting as 'work' but the three women all chose to include narration of these periods as part of their

‘working’ lives so evidently saw them as part of their ‘work’. They found themselves on the boundary of the field trying to position themselves on the inside but initially lacked sufficient capital (Bourdieu 2010) in the form of qualifications or experience to secure *paid* work.

Whether the voluntary manner of their entry into teaching says anything at all about their longevity and subsequent Veteran status is hard to say. Being willing to work without pay could be an argument to say that this was an early example of their determination and the depth of their desire to teach. There might also be an argument to be made around the lesser expectations that institutions place on volunteers, thence allowing for a less pressurised, elongated induction. Hustinx *et al* (2010) theorise that there is a separateness that protects volunteers from the general demands of a workforce.

To begin with Donna, she may have been insulated from institutional demands during her volunteering period. She recalled how she made herself valuable by meeting the college’s urgent need, ‘because they were always desperate for people to do maths, that’s what I started with’ (Donna Narrative Section 1).

However, it would be hard to say that volunteering reduced the pressure she was under generally. Donna had to work incredibly hard to ‘self-fashion’ herself into a teacher (McNay 1991). Her Career Map data revealed that she was 34 years old and had just finished an Open University degree, when she started volunteering around 1993. (Donna Career Map). Her maths degree gave her sufficient legitimacy to claim expertise in her subject but was not yet sufficient for paid work. Donna narrated how she began by teaching adult basic skills mathematics evening classes on a voluntary basis in two general further education colleges about 15 miles apart:

I did a bit of volunteering for XX (urban) college and quite a lot for XXX (rural) college (Donna Narrative Section 2).

She went on to explain this very hectic period of her working life in sections 2 and 3 of her narrative. On top of having a small child and her paid day job as an administrator in a charity, she also had her two evening volunteering jobs. She must have been spending money on travel and must have been working most evenings but she did not narrate this detail, making no mention of how difficult this period must have been for her and her family. As we went on, quickly brushing over difficult times, became a noticeable characteristic of Donna's storytelling (Donna Narrative Sections 2 and 3).

The rural college Donna was volunteering at:

'offered me some work as a 'variable hours' tutor teaching maths' (Donna Narrative Section 2).

Her volunteering was overtly strategized towards her transformation in that she weighed her own need to increase her skills and experience to increase her employability, against the donation of unpaid work (Hustinx *et al* 2010). For her, the 'rules of the game' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) for entry to the field of further education were that she had to work unpaid, which she evidently identified as a *quid pro quo* transaction for the unspecified promise of future paid work. Although all her effort did get her paid work, it was insecure work with unsocial hours at first. She accepted the casualised contract but was then offered a similar opportunity by the urban college and started teaching there on a paid basis as well.

I got offered to do some teaching for [urban college] in the evenings so I did a couple of evening classes (Donna Narrative Section 3).

At this point in the narrative, we see the dominance of economic capital in Donna's decision-making (Siem & McCarthy 2023). Donna did not have the security of existing economic capital to allow her to be unwaged. Donna found herself in an 'antagonistic' position at the edge of the further education field as she struggled to insert herself into the first layer of the field's 'strata' (Bourdieu 2010 p.257) and establish a field position. She was trying to 'self-fashion' (McNay 1991) into a substantive career in teaching but she had to take a big financial risk in giving up an administrative day job to accept the two zero hours contracts that gave her no guarantee of continuing work. In her memory, this period of extreme precarity felt like a very slow process. Donna wanted to emphasise how slow the start to her career had been, repeating her point. 'So, it was all sort of a gradual thing' (Donna Narrative Section 4) and: 'So, it was sort of a gradual process' (Donna Narrative Section 5). It was another two years before the urban college offered her a substantial permanent contract and she stopped working for the rural college. It took Donna three years in total to get a permanent contract. Her unpaid work and precarious work allowed her to refashion herself and perhaps build her social capital with connections within the organisations. The elongated period of transition between her administrative job and teaching perhaps allowed her to prove her worth in the eyes of managers and allow Donna to build enough trust in them to take the financial risk of giving up a stable job.

The large imprint this three-year period made in her memory may also speak to her 'Veteran' status; after such a struggle to break into further education teaching, it seemed to have been experienced as a massive achievement. To return to the figure of 21% (ONS 2019) of further education teachers leaving in one year given in the Context chapter, Donna's story problematises the notion of a 'first year' in

teaching. By the time she got her first full-time equivalent (FTE) contract and would count in the figures, she was already three years into her career and fully committed to the career change. This commitment may well speak to her veteran-ness.

To move the focus onto Amy, there is less of an argument for strategy in her reinvention of herself as a further education teacher. Amy's start in teaching also came through voluntary work but it was more of a happy accident than a focused plan. Her Career Map conversation revealed that she was 29 years old in 1997 and had been volunteering in a women's refuge where an 'Access to Access' course was being delivered as part of a community outreach programme. Her original ambition was to do social work with women in the community (see quotation above) but she found that teaching study skills gave her a sense of purpose. There is more of the altruistic than strategic element in Amy's volunteering:

Having done an Access course myself I felt quite passionate about it (Amy Narrative Section 1).

It seems that her change of direction, from social work to teaching, was based on her desire to replicate the change she had experienced herself in the lives of others. However, like Donna, Amy lacked economic capital and needed to seek paid work, her donation of unpaid work was still ultimately transactional even if she was less aware of it at the time.

Amy benefited from further education's porous field boundaries (Bathmaker 2015). Amy's example of adult education taking place in a semi-domestic setting not only shows the insufficiency of the current dominant Skills discourse to describe further education but also shows the difficulty of defining the boundaries of the field. Amy

had originally volunteered in a social work role: 'I wanted to do outreach work for women' (Amy Narrative Section 1) but it metamorphosed into teaching because that was what the women in the refuge needed. For Amy, the porous field boundary became a metaphorical permeable membrane that allowed her to find a new career path. Deconstructing the barrier between public and private spheres allowed Amy to see herself as capable of paid teaching work (Baldock 1998). Having left school at 15, teaching was not something Amy had aspired to but voluntary teaching in the refuge allowed her a liminal space that was partially public but partially private to experiment and build her self-confidence.

The refuge was connected to FE because it was through an FE college, the Access to Access, but I didn't work for them just sort of helped out voluntary (Amy Narrative Section 1).

Within the environment of the refuge, Amy had cultural capital (Bourdieu 2010) embodied in her knowledge of how to progress through the education system as an adult. Within the refuge, noticeably devoid of the hegemonic Skills discourse of further education, she was neither isolated nor peripheral. Her passionate belief in the social efficacy of her teaching also carried her through that imagined barrier.

After a few months of voluntary work, Amy decided that teaching was something she enjoyed. She did some part-time teacher training which in turn gave her the opportunity to apply for teaching hours in the local college on the same course she had been volunteering on, enabling her to move away from the periphery of the field:

the FE college came back to me and said that they had some paid hours doing Access to Access work and was I interested... that was my proper sort of start to teaching in FE (Amy Narrative Section 2).

She embarked on her first year of paid teaching with a reserve of confidence built up during her volunteering. She had increased her embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986) in that she knew she could look and sound like a teacher and people would see her in that way. Like Donna, by the time Amy would count in the ONS 21% figure of people who leave teaching within the first year, she was already experienced and committed. However, as will be shown later, Amy faced struggles later in her career and by the time of the interview had moved away from front-line teaching into a digital training role. It could be argued that her comparatively gentle, though still financially risky, entry to teaching, did not fully prepare her for what would come later.

Wendy's experience of reinventing herself as a teacher fully tested her commitment, but she also suggested that the complex power relationships of volunteering gave her the opportunity to develop her teaching skills without the fear of being judged as an employee. Her Career Map data showed that she was 33 years old in 1999 when she found her way into teaching. Wendy found a voluntary teaching placement at the local college teaching English as a Second/Other Language (ESOL). Like the other women, her narrative included memories of going through early difficulties. Her first experience of teaching was challenging. The teacher appointed as her mentor took the opportunity to split her group and gave Wendy the responsibility of half the class, leaving her to cope on her own:

instead of putting me with the more able, because I was a novice, she put me with those that had little English. I was trying to figure it out...honestly!

But what it did was it made me determined to do better (Wendy Narrative Section 2).

Wendy framed herself as having little power in this process, she positioned herself as a 'novice' in a way that is reminiscent of induction through a trial by ordeal.

Wendy's lack of institutionalised cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986) in the form of qualifications or experience meant she had to accept a situation that she evidently saw as unfair.

When Wendy says that she was 'trying to figure it out' she seemed to feel the challenge is initially beyond her skills and that the classes were not going as well as she had hoped. If this had been a paid job it could have been enough to put Wendy off teaching. However, her volunteer status gave her freedom from the college's regulatory gaze and pressures put on an employee to reach a level of competence during a probationary period. Volunteering allowed Wendy to 'figure it out' for herself and pass through this emotional period of trial (Blackmore 1996) whilst maintaining her own agency. She was able to experiment and fail without a mentor watching her.

Wendy showed a stoicism that was to become a characteristic of her narrative and this begins to build a picture of someone with the character traits that enabled her to become a Veteran in further education. She uses the word 'determined' in the quote above, suggesting that Wendy found motivation in difficult situations. It is notable that Wendy's reaction to difficulty stands in contrast to Chiong's (2017) findings from a study of school-teachers, that suggest that early career positive experiences were an important influence on sustaining a career. Chiong's study found that the teachers' belief that they were 'good at it' (p.25) was one of the most sustaining factors. At this early point, Wendy did not believe that she was 'good at

it' as she says: 'I was trying to figure it out...honestly!' but it may be significant that she had the ability to reflect on her practice and sense that she could improve her teaching. She used the voluntary experience as an opportunity to develop. The voluntary work led to her being offered sessional teaching work in ESOL (on a zero hours contract) without having to apply. The small aside comment that Wendy made about not being asked to go through the application process or interview suggests that she did develop both her expertise and her social capital through her volunteering. The managers within the institution evidently felt that they knew her well enough not to require formal processes.

The unpaid work that the three women did at the start of their careers can be seen as exploitative or as transformative. General feminist theory codes women's unpaid work as exploitative, however, it is notable that the majority of feminist theories of unpaid work tend to focus on the domestic sphere of housework and childcare (Chen 2005, Gimenez 2019, Khan *et al* 2023) rather than the type of workplace volunteering that the women took part in. Blackmore (1996 p.13) does supplement feminist theory with an exploration of the invisible additional work done by female school educators which she sees as exploitation by 'greedy organisations'.

Blackmore is critical of theorising women's additional work in schools as being based on simplistic ideas of 'nurturance' and suggests a move towards 'mutually satisfactory reciprocal relations' (*ibid.*). Although Blackmore's research does not mirror the Veterans' volunteering, the idea of reciprocity is useful in giving an analysis of why the women allowed themselves to be exploited. I have suggested that their choices were transactional in order to gain entry but the transaction was nuanced by elements of reciprocity in the cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986) that they gained. They were all able to improve their disempowered negotiating position and

self-confidence. In Amy's case it might be added that her working class habitus did not allow her initially to imagine herself as a teacher.

However, to give further analysis as to why the women's capital lacked value, I need to examine the interaction of habitus and capital in the field of further education. Burke (2015) uses Bourdieu's formula of '[(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice' (Bourdieu 1984, p.101) to explain the interaction of habitus and capital within a dynamic context which produces practice. However, here I start to question whether the weak field definitions of further education have a dynamic influence on capital and habitus. The women show that they embody a disposition for further education both in their backgrounds and their own educational experiences, so their own embodied habitus is not the significant variable.

An alternative interpretation is that the institutional habitus of the field, infused by the Skills discourse that did not place a high value on the non-vocational knowledge the women possessed. Paradoxically, at the time the subject areas were relatively well-funded and their work was obviously required but these factors did not raise the women's capital enough to break the practice of expecting unpaid work as part of the elongated entry to the profession.

If these participants were marginalised by the Skills discourse, it can still be argued that gender played a part in their entry to the field. Bourdieu recognised gender as a variant in habitus (Bourdieu 1977) and for these women, there is a gendered element to their perceived lack of capital and hence their marginalised position in the field. Their knowledge sets were considered parallel and marginal to the main intent of further education. An additional contextual frame that might contribute to the analysis is that by the 1990s the UK economy was shifting slowly away from heavy industry (Weston 2024), further education was still characterised by the

image of technical colleges, dominated by male dominated subjects such as construction, motor vehicle and engineering. However unfair it may seem, the women developed a sense of the rules of the game for them and what they had to do be allowed to play.

Masquelier (2018) suggests that experiences of precarity such as the women's exploitative beginnings as further education teachers can become a dominant symbol that alters and moderates behaviours and perceptions towards self-limitation. Contrastingly, the women themselves chose to portray these initial experiences of precarity positively both through humorous tone and the symbolic meanings attached. The structure of the narration of the women's stories about starting in teaching follow an arc of difficulties conquered, showing how they chose to position themselves in relation to their later careers. These stories are part of their legend or self-mythologising, that show their career choice was not simple. In the face of multiple intersectional barriers, they took a path that was not laid out for them into a field that did not initially welcome them. In remembering and celebrating their agentive struggle and eventual success in getting those first jobs they are perhaps trying to confirm their reinvention. Using Foucault's idea of 'genealogy' (1977), the overcoming of barriers appears to draw on what Foucault saw as a tradition of Christian asceticism where one has to pass through a sort of moral cleansing through pain. Subconsciously, perhaps, the women's subsequent long careers represent the reward for their stoicism. They earned their place and it is not something to be lightly given up. The 'genealogy' of their veteran-ness is important to them; it has been generative of their values and it is not something to be forgotten or obscured by their later careers.

That element of strategizing in the transaction of unpaid work in exchange for increased cultural and social capital (Bourdieu 1986) supports the interpretation of agency over exploitation. Bourdieu uses the phrase *on 'paie de sa personne'* (1986 p.18) which translates as 'we pay with our own person,' to describe the acquisition of capital. The women paid with their time but gained enough institutional cultural capital to be able to say they had experience (qualifications will be discussed in 6.2), and to demonstrate the acquisition of institutional habitus. The acquisition of social capital through connections and building personal networks also had a role.

The women's willingness to work unpaid can be interpreted as taking agency into their own hands to reject their allocated place in the world. All three women had already started on their process of reinvention prior to their volunteering work through their decisions to return to education as adults. McNay (1999 p.4) suggests that 'the process of active self-fashioning' can be used to understand the 'subjectivity of women in terms other than those of passive victims of patriarchy'. Passivity may be a learnt behaviour in the face of patriarchal oppression but it is not inevitable. I would argue that using voluntary work as a way into teaching, for these women, was 'transgressive' and a 'self-formative act of freedom' (Aladjem 1991 p.288) in that they managed to negotiate their way around a system that was not designed to accommodate them.

The value of unpaid work for these women as a way of getting experience and networking was shown in the fact that they all moved into paid work and even though permanent contracts did not come immediately, they were able to show their value through volunteering. For Wendy and Amy, the opportunity to build their self-confidence and make mistakes in a safe way was also important.

Unfortunately, their initial paid jobs were of an insecure nature with contractual

terms that would allow the employer to withdraw the work without notice or severance payment.

### 6.2.2 The men

The pattern of starting on an insecure contract with fragmented hours was also evident in the men's experience. Contrastingly, the male participants were all paid for their first teaching so their experience of precarity was different to the women's. As previously stated, the contrast in financial recognition between the female and male participants can be seen as part of the wider Skills discourse within further education around the value placed on certain, often traditionally male-identified skills sets and knowledge underpinned by patriarchy. Hence, the men's initial capital (social and cultural) was higher than the women's, rendering the donation of unpaid labour unnecessary. It is, therefore, immediately evident that the 'rules of the game' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1996, p.168–175) for entry into further education teaching showed a gender-based difference. However, even though they were being paid, for two of the male participants, there was still precarity in their initial work in further education which may have had a lasting impact and influenced the value they placed on their long careers.

Although Sam was being paid for his work when he first entered further education, he experienced a three-year lag between his first teaching and securing a proper teaching role:

I started in 1997. It was a struggle back then but I got my foot in the door and 12 months later I got my first proper job as an instructor. So I became an electrical instructor. I did that for a couple of years (Sam Narrative Section 1).

For the first year, he worked part-time on a zero-hours contract before spending two years in an 'instructor' role. The issue of jobs that are essentially teaching but that are not designated as teaching was highlighted in 2.8.1 and Sam's recall of the 'struggle' indicated the exploitative nature of this practice. Sam had sufficient institutional cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986) based on his vocational knowledge as an electrician to gain an initial foothold, but even so he still had to accumulate social capital and show appropriate skills by accepting the lower paid instructor role. Although the institutions' motivation in avoiding classifying jobs as 'teacher' is undoubtedly financial, to Sam it must have felt like another gate keeping him out of where he wanted to be.

Sam was 27 years old when he started his career in 1997 and was leaving a well-paid job as an electrician for an uncertain future in further education. His narrative showed his motivation was based on his own experience of being taught as an apprentice.

There was a teacher there, at college, who completely changed my opinion of education. There was a young dynamic guy who could talk to any of us, any subject, any level and when I left college, I thought I would really like to be like him (Sam Narrative Section 5).

Sam's motivation appears to be social rather than economic as an experienced electrician would usually be paid more than a beginner further education teacher. From the perspective of an apprentice electrician, the teacher occupied a privileged position of power, based on his cultural capital, knowledge, competence and qualification that raised the teacher above the level of the experienced electricians that Sam saw every day. In Bourdieusian terms, Sam questioned his own social position and saw a 'crossing point' (Bourdieu 2010 p.344) in teaching to change his

social trajectory. He made a significant personal choice in valuing his social position over his initial economic position.

Sam's ability to adapt and learn the unspoken 'rules of the game' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p.168) within his new social field was evidently an advantage in securing his trajectory. Already seemingly advantaged by his high capital subject area of 'Electrical', he was able to improve his position and legitimacy within the college by accruing more symbolic capital in the form of a skill that was held in high esteem. He found an opportunity to lead an innovative project developing on-line learning materials with external funding and took it up.

I got seconded for a couple of years to run a programme where we developed the whole construction curriculum and moved them onto online. Then they used what I did at the time at the college for the European Social Fund to promote that and they got a million pounds or a million and a half pounds of funding (Sam Narrative Section 2).

In the early 2000s digital skills were scarce and were starting to be seen as high value. In a sector where funding is always lacking, the ability to seek out and secure external funding was also highly valued. Sam had learnt the 'rules', proving his value to the organisation and thus allowing him to secure the prized permanent teaching contract.

Mike experienced similar issues with starting on a fractional, zero-hours contract but for a much shorter time. His transition from industry to teaching was somewhat easier than Sam's. Mike was the oldest participant, at 40 years old, when he started his teaching career in 2002. His life stage complicated his decision to change careers as he had a family and could not afford to be unwaged. He had a

wealth of industry experience to offer an employer but for Mike, it was his habitus and disposition (Bourdieu 2010) that was initially lacking. The move into teaching was a massive change for him. His troubled social background (see 5.1.7) meant that he lacked any of the cultural or social capital that would have led him towards a career in education. When he applied for a teaching job in his local GFE college, he did not have anyone to call on to explain what an interview micro-teach should look like and did not understand how to speak or behave in an interview (Bourdieu 1986). The fact that he chose to narrate his experience at interview 20 years later, showed what a shockingly memorable event it was for him. He recalled:

I ballsed up the interview really. I didn't know what to do see... there wasn't a lot of guidance so I did some practical stuff for them. The head of school said to me, 'What are you doing there?' and I said it's masonry angles, I said to him 'What do you do?' and he said he was a chippy so I said, 'Well you should know that shouldn't you? That went down like a lead balloon! (Mike Narrative Section 1).

Realising he had got the tone wrong, he nearly abandoned the interview but was persuaded to stay:

I said to the interviewer...'look I'm off' and she said 'no, no come and be interviewed. She said, 'try doing an evening class and get into it that way' (Mike Narrative Section 1).

So, despite his poor interview, Mike got the chance to start teaching and did his first year as an hourly paid staff member teaching carpentry evening classes to adults. Although this was a precarious contract, it may have been of benefit to Mike. The evening class option meant that he was able to go on working at his day

job whilst getting some teaching experience. Like the female participants, he was able to use the smaller commitment as a testing period. In contrast to the women however, he was paid for his time, underlining the argument that these male-identified skills are more valued in a further education setting. When he was offered a full-time permanent role at the end of one year, he was able to make an informed decision.

M did not share the fragmented experiences of the rest of the group. Teaching was M's third career after ship-building and photography. His motivation in moving to teaching was initially to leave behind his unsustainable and problematic photography career. The unemployment rate at the time was between 8 and 9% (Office for National Statistics 2023) and his main concern was not to have to return to the shipyard that he described as a 'nasty, horrible, dirty job' (M Career Map conversation).

In 1995 I ended up working for a company called X. It's a charity set up to help the disenfranchised, teaching unemployed folk and we set up a photographic course, we created a local newspaper and we got unemployed, off the dole, right, and taught them how to work the cameras and let them loose. We published a weekly paper and a monthly magazine. It was a great job (M. Career Map conversation).

He said that he built-up his role in community based further education gradually but did not appear to have had to struggle with zero hours contracts or working unpaid. He spent the first five years of his career in that role and appeared to have gained satisfaction from the work which could not be said of his later working life.

Apart from M, working on contracts that offered few employment rights or protection was a repeated feature of the beginning stage of participants' further education working lives. The issue of casualised contracts was discussed in 2.8 of the Context chapter, where UCU research was cited that found 71% of people who work under casualised contracts believed their health had been damaged by the experience (UCU 2019 p.4). The impact on the Veterans of the experience of working on casualised contracts at the start of their careers may have been dulled and forgotten over time. Sam was the only one who remembered it as a 'struggle'. The other participants recalled these events as expected on the way to a permanent job. The precarious nature of their employment in these early years could be said to have been 'normalised' by the internal discourse of further education and to exist as symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1999). This precarity was something that the participants blamed on themselves: they attributed it to their lack of appropriate skills, knowledge and experience. The repressive power to deny fair employment conditions is productive for the employer in that they take fewer risks. If Mike's evening class had gone poorly, or Sam had not shown his willingness to develop his role, then the employers had risked very little. They simply do not offer a more secure contract. The risk is all on the part of the employee.

The participants' narratives showed the difficult decisions that these already mature people with financial responsibilities were faced with when seeking to move into teaching. They had made sacrifices and had risked their families' financial well-being. Once that permanent contract was finally obtained, they had been conditioned by the experience of precarity to see it as a precious prize not to be easily given away. The fact that the participants weathered these difficult first years

speaks of their individual determination which can be thought of as feeding into their veteran-ness.

The gender-based differences in their experiences correlate somewhat with the research cited in 2.12 about the difference in the behaviour of men and women in applying for jobs and the way they were treated when they did. It was noted that 'gender differences in self-perceptions' (Nicks *et al* 2022 p.30) influence patterns of job applications suggesting that women needed more reassurance that they met job criteria before applying. The negative self-perceptions of the women participants in under-valuing their skills enough to work unpaid, had been produced by the intersecting layers of social disadvantage that their life experience had dealt them up to that point. However, their reticence cannot be explained solely through self-perception. Shue's (Shue 2021) result shows correlation with the experiences recalled in the narratives of the women participants who had to, or felt they had to, prove their worth before applying for jobs. The eventual job application had a much lower personal risk (or in Wendy's case no risk at all) of being rejected and further denting their self-confidence. In contrast, Mike was employed solely on his 'potential' which in his own recollection of his interview was difficult to perceive.

Interestingly, the UK research found that: 'relevant qualifications were a stronger predictor of willingness to apply for women than for men' (Nicks *et al* 2022 p.30) which correlates with the idea of gendered caution shown in my data and leads to the theme of Qualification.

### 6.3 Theme 2: Qualification

This theme is concerned with the teaching qualifications of the Veterans. The focus here is qualification specifically as objectified or symbolic capital rather than

embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986), and the increased professionalism of learning the skills and techniques of teaching that is presumed to come from completing a qualification (Hoyle 1975). (The construction of professional identity, which may or may not accompany qualification, will be examined in more detail further on in this chapter.)

In previous chapters (see 2.10) I have outlined how teacher training qualifications are part of the picture of constant change in further education. This section will examine the historical landscape of further education teaching qualifications. Here I will start to present evidence from the data to support an argument that these qualifications have been a point of ongoing tension.

From a Bourdieusian perspective, qualification, can be seen as part of the Veterans' positioning within the wider field of education aimed at gaining professional status. However, the data presented here will show how complex gaining status via qualification can be in further education. I will also employ Foucault to consider the impact of the Veterans' qualifications on the genealogy of their 'veteran-ness' and their struggle for personal and or professional legitimisation.

Figure 9: Qualifications of the participants

|   | Participant | Qualification                                                                               | Teaching qualifications                                                                                                                                                                        |
|---|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Amy         | Social science degree<br>Masters' Digital Leadership                                        | 9282 Teaching Basic Skills Literacy<br>7307 Level 3 FE Teaching<br>7407 Level 4 FE Teaching<br>PGCE (FE)<br>Level 4 Literacy Specialist teacher<br>Level 5 Numeracy Specialist teacher<br>QTLS |
| 2 | M           | HND photography                                                                             | Could not recall title of award but<br>Level 5 or 6                                                                                                                                            |
| 3 | Donna       | Mixed subject degree from Open University<br>Masters' Education                             | 9282 Teaching Basic Skills literacy<br>9283 Teaching Basic Skills Numeracy<br>PGCE (FE)<br>Level 4 Literacy Specialist teacher<br>Level 5 Numeracy Specialist teacher                          |
| 4 | Wendy       | Social Work degree<br>Varied computing qualifications<br>Masters' Education<br>MSc Business | 9282 Teaching Basic Skills literacy<br>9283 Teaching Basic Skills Numeracy<br>7307 Level 3 FE Teaching<br>7407 Level 4 FE Teaching<br>PGCE (FE)                                                |
| 5 | Sam         | Electrical installation apprenticeship<br>Masters' Education                                | Certificate in Education Level 5                                                                                                                                                               |
| 6 | Mike        | Bench Joiner apprenticeship<br>PG Cert Coaching                                             | Certificate in Further Education Teaching<br>Uni based Certificate of Education<br>Level 5 or 6<br>QTLS                                                                                        |

The career map conversations and the narratives revealed that the participants all held a teaching qualification specifically designed for further education at or above the Level 5 minimum that has continued to be a recommendation after the repeal of 'The Further Education Teachers' Qualifications (England) Regulations 2007' following the Lingfield report (2012). However, the narratives revealed that the short and long-term impact of the training varied greatly between individuals, so a closer look at what these qualifications meant within their individual careers is necessary.

The gendered difference seen in the previous section is echoed here in that the three female participants self-funded their first teacher training qualifications whereas the male participants had theirs paid for by employers. This difference was related to the women's volunteer status at the start of their careers. However, the participants' narratives also revealed a pattern of the women completing multiple qualifications unlike the men, a feature that requires further examination.

#### 6.3.1 Qualifications of the women

Early in their narratives, Amy, Wendy and Donna spoke about taking initial teacher training qualifications which began prior and during their volunteering experience. However, for all three, there was a pattern of multiple and overlapping qualifications.

Amy's account was representative of this pattern:

I had done the City and Guilds 7307 and then the 7407 and another City and Guilds one for Basic Skills just out of my own interest (Amy Narrative Section 2).

This first set of qualifications began during her volunteering and can be seen as part of her developing her habitus as well as her legitimation within the field.

Figure 3 shows that Wendy had needed even more reassurance through qualification. She explained that on leaving university she had not gone into social work as she had planned but continued taking qualifications:

for a few years I did every computing course you could think of. I started with CLAIT, I did word processing. Then I had done the 7307 (Wendy Narrative Section 1).

Fig. 3 also shows that Wendy had completed two courses in teaching Basic Skills prior to the 7407 that took her into the college as a volunteer teacher and determined her career direction (Wendy Narrative Section 2).

Donna had also used self-funded qualifications to gain initial entry to the professional field of further education but the sequence was slightly different. She remembered:

I did their volunteer training course, the old 9282 and 9283 and I started volunteering with them at X college (Donna Narrative Section 2).

For Donna the qualifications were a way of unlocking the door for a volunteering position rather than an end in themselves.

For the three women, there is an agentic element of strategizing in the repeated qualifications to build confidence and explore possibilities. From a feminist perspective, McNay explains the women's lack of confidence and why they felt the need to do multiple courses: 'the individual must break down established subject positions in order to discover hitherto unexplored potentiality' (McNay 2007 p.134).

There is also a practical element. Starting with a small, part-time Level 3 or 4 qualification that was usually taught as an evening class allowed access to people who were working in other jobs, like Donna or had caring responsibilities, like Wendy thus facilitating their gradual entry into the profession. The smaller qualifications had allowed them to self-fund and obtain voluntary teaching hours before moving on to look for paid work.

However, it is notable that within a workforce that has a female gender majority, these women found more barriers than the men in gaining entry to the preserved status of further education teacher. The three women had all done multiple

qualifications that were intended to be initial teacher training. Amy and Wendy continued the pattern of multiple qualifications throughout their careers. Amy had done six different initial teacher training courses. Some of these did involve subject knowledge development but this still seems excessive. Wendy had done four teacher training qualifications and two master's degrees.

The repetition of qualifications may reflect the actual or perceived precarity of their careers and their need to strengthen their claims to specialist knowledge in an environment which favours practical skills above academic skills. For both Amy and Wendy, the characters that emerged from the narratives were of women who took a long time to build their self-confidence and the belief that they are entitled to a place in the teaching profession suggesting elements of 'imposter syndrome' (Clance and Imes 1975) which was originally theorised through observations of women. To analyse the reasons for their low self-confidence after such short meetings would be presumptuous but the conjunction of their personal histories, class expectations and in Wendy's case perhaps racial stereotyping could explain their mind set.

However, it can be seen that there is a structurally gendered element to why these qualifications did not appear to 'qualify' them sufficiently to make the women feel accepted or have the intended effect on their careers. The accumulation of symbolic capital (Bourdieu 2010) did not mitigate the power of a field structured to value male dominated vocational skills.

This interpretation is reinforced by the observation that all three women had gone on to do PGCEs after they had completed awarding body ITT qualifications. They had all done this prior to the 2007 requirements, as a voluntary reinforcement for their professional status. There was not a clear explanation of this decision in their

narratives but the constant change of awarding body qualifications stands in contrast to the constancy of the PGCE giving it additional symbolic capital and wide recognition as a badge of legitimacy. For those who seek certainty in the hazy landscape of further education qualifications, it offered reassuring solidity.

We can also interpret this choice as part of their quest for legitimacy in the use of the title 'teacher' and reinforcement of professional identity. I would interpret the women's struggle as one for recognition rather than qualification *per se* but without the PGCE there appeared to be no defined point when the gateway of 'teacher' was passed through. The weakness of field properties (Bourdieu 2010) in further education has had an impact in obscuring the portal for professional entry. The Skills discourse would suggest a focus on vocational skills as a point of legitimacy, but for these women, that was unavailable.

Additionally, the three women did not fit with the picture of further education professionalism that emerged from the literature review thus problematising their claims to status. Their academic qualifications did not directly (Amy and Wendy) or fully (Donna) reflect their subject teaching. Thus, they initially lacked the claims to professional knowledge that James believes defined a profession (James 2017 p. 109). They also did not have the vocational experience and qualifications that Gleeson *et al* (2015) observe had been considered of greater value by further education employers than teaching qualifications. Perceiving themselves as slightly outside of the norm, the university endorsed PGCE, may have offered a greater legitimacy in their own self-view.

A belief that qualifications would open doors could also reveal an underlying assumption of meritocracy in their employment environment. Littler (2018 p.49)

says that: 'The ideology of meritocracy has ... long been yoked to the idea of career advancement from egalitarian beginnings'. As discussed in 3.3.4, Littler contends, as does Sandel (2021), that meritocracy is a damaging myth. Within this view, the neoliberal competitive construct of meritocracy places the responsibility for what is termed as an 'egalitarian deficit' (Littler 2018 p.51) such as being black, female, working class and lacking education on the individual to compensate for in order to compete on their 'merit'. The women's repetitious qualifications can be seen as an attempt to 'add value' to themselves as a product.

### 6.3.2 The qualifications of the men

The pattern of qualifications for the men was very different. Mike had also completed two types of initial teacher training qualifications (see Fig. 3) but his experience differed from that of the women as he was already in a paid teaching position and both qualifications were funded by his employers. He explained that for him the smaller awarding body qualification was a vital stepping stone between his industry thinking and thinking in the more academic way required for his university Certificate in Education. He had left school at 15 to take an apprenticeship and was 40 before entering teaching (Mike Career Map conversation). Becoming a qualified teacher was important to him both for what he learnt and for the realisation that he had the ability to be academic:

I did the CFET [Certificate in Further Education and Training] which was excellent. The teachers there was [sic] amazing. They were so good and so patient with someone who hadn't done any study for a very, very long time but for some weird reason it really interested me and I got right into it (Mike Narrative Section 4).

He had a sense of amazement that he found studying interesting. The awarding body qualification, CFET was current in the early 2000s. It was intended to be a full three stage programme but having achieved that he went on to do the Level 5 or 6 Certificate in Education through a university. His pride when he received his certificate was palpable.

I remember walking down the cathedral looking like Harry Potter to get my Cert. Ed and there was (name of teacher training lecturer) I had a lot of respect for her but she was very straight, there she was clapping and cheering for me. In the summer holidays between the two years of the Cert Ed, I spent the whole holiday getting my head around it and it really paid off (Mike Work-life interview Q.6).

Having discovered that if he worked hard at it, he could achieve academically he then went on to do post-graduate studies in mentoring at a university and to do the QTLS professional formation. Mike had felt himself marginalised by his deprived background that had classified him as non-academic. The qualifications changed Mike's self-image as a person and can be interpreted as a victory in his struggle against the disempowerment of his problematic youth. Mike reinforced his belief that the two types of teaching qualification had been of benefit to him. He speculated that, 'if I hadn't done that [CFET], I wouldn't be here now' (Mike Narrative Section 4). The qualifications did not necessarily increase his capital but were powerful personal symbols of his personal reinvention (McNay 2007).

In contrast, M and Sam placed little value on their teacher training qualifications. From their perspective, the fact they completed ITT qualifications at all represents the coercive disciplinary power of the state based on changes in the political discourse around further education teaching in the early 2000s. The rationality of

the power to compel M and Sam to train could be said to be based on a governmental attempt to promote professionalism in further education teaching by 'correcting' and normalising behaviours (Foucault 1977). However, for these two participants, their professionalism (Hoyle 1975) appears to have been pre-established and they saw the conferring of external professional status as unnecessary and unwanted.

M's early teaching jobs in charity, community and college settings seem to have been done without any requirement for teacher training. He said,

Back in the old days, we're talking 90s, you didn't need qualifications to do stuff like that, I slipped into it (M Narrative Section 1).

However, his entry into prison teaching in 2007 coincided with the changes in the requirements to have a teaching qualification in further education (Regulatory Framework for FE Teaching Qualifications 2007). He recalled,

then I was put through various different courses, that were needed or required to do it [teaching]...I went to XX College to do it... PEP ...not PEP... RPCE...something...the teaching qualification, it used to be a one year teaching qualification, it's now two years PCGE [sic] or something it's called...anyway they put me through that when I ended up in prison (M. Narrative section 2).

M said he was 'put through' and 'required,' to do a training course, which suggests that it was not his choice and reinforces the assumption that his training was prompted by the prison applying the new government rules. Despite three attempts, M did not remember the title of his teaching qualification. He appeared to be trying to remember PGCE but as he did not have a degree that doesn't seem

right. It could be PCET he was trying to recall (overarching term for teaching qualifications applied to post-compulsory education and training). This short passage was the entirety of his narration on the subject, further reinforcing the conclusion that the teaching qualification held no value for M.

Similarly, Sam's narrative suggests that he felt that he was coerced into training by the 2007 regulation, long after he entered teaching.

I wasn't that fussed about being a qualified teacher to be honest but it was made a mandatory requirement to get your teaching qual (Sam Work-life interview Q4).

Sam had worked in further education for nearly 10 years without a formal qualification. This fact suggest that Sam had an ability to absorb the unwritten rules of further education without training and although he made no claims about his own skills, it can be inferred from his career progression that he was good at what he did. He had already collected institutional and social capital. We saw earlier (in Theme 1) how he enhanced his workplace status by adding digital knowledge to his already valuable electrical knowledge. His acquired professional habitus increased his professional worth allowing him to move relatively quickly through the hierarchy of further education teaching without being formally trained for the job he was doing. His ability to progress without the qualifications, also shows the attitude of institutions to teacher training as being unnecessary or of less value than vocational skills (Gleeson *et al* 2015). The 2007 regulations caused many institutions to mandate a legacy of experienced but unqualified staff to train. By the point when he took his qualification, Sam was already a manager at his institution. As a manager, to sit in a classroom with people who were new to teaching or were even his own staff must have been difficult but Sam didn't explain why he didn't

want to do the training. It was evident that his professional power as a manager was eclipsed by governmental power over his employment. He did not manage to negotiate his way around this policy and completed a Cert Ed but he didn't feel that he got anything out of his teacher training. In the interview Sam talked about his surprise at finding out that colleagues in other colleges had actually enjoyed their training.

I thought, they would say the same as me about teacher training but they all pretty much thought it was great and it really helped them (Sam Work-Life Interview).

He explained his differing view as being caused by a 'duff' teacher, which may be true but doing 'initial' training after 10 years' teaching, was inevitably going to have negatively impacted his experience.

The data showed contrasting experiences and reflections on the Veterans' qualifications. Unexpectedly, the experience of teaching qualifications emerged from the narratives as something more complex than the literature had suggested. Tully (2023) suggests that training 'gives the power to recognise' to gate-keepers such as employers or awarding bodies as their proxies to decide what is acceptable (Tully 2023 p.27) but for the women and Mike it was their own sense of recognition that was important. The qualifications helped to establish the confidence of legitimacy and perhaps embodied cultural capital in their own eyes rather than producing a standardised pedagogical habitus. For Sam and M the mandatory qualification was a coercive and unwanted imposition.

As we have seen, the participants in this study had all sought to re-invent themselves with a change of career into teaching. Their narratives around the

process of qualification were revealing about the difficulties some of the participants had with that process in silencing their own inner doubting voices as they sought entry to a professional grouping and claimed specialist knowledge and the elevated status of a privileged group, respected in society. Again, in this section, my interpretation of the data is that for some of the participants their struggle of reinvention and believing that they have become a further education teacher was indicative of the value they place on their careers and their stoicism in the face of precarity.

The key finding here is that the symbolic capital of a teaching qualification is not absolute. Instead, the level of prestige it confers is variable depending on context. The significance of qualification is shown to be more individual than social. This is an indication that the attempt to consolidate a sector or stable 'field' through the regulation wasn't wholly successful. The weakness of field definitions of further education is evidenced in the different experiences and attitudes to training of the Veterans. The lack of what Bourdieu defined as 'functional and structural homology' (Bourdieu 2010 p.229) or consistent practice within further education does not sufficiently set out a clear logic within the field that allows the field to orchestrate itself in defining what the rules are. Weak field orchestration allows who decides what the rules are to be opaque and localised.

For example, for schoolteachers, entry to the profession is guarded by universities and by the Teaching Regulation Agency as a sub-section of the Department for Education. The acquisition of Qualified Teacher Status is stipulated by legislation and although there has been some de-regulation through the introduction of Academy schools, it remains a very recognisable gateway to the profession. For

further education the benchmark to gain entry to the professional grouping is less well-defined.

In addition to the unmandated array of teacher training options, the Education and Training Foundation have attempted to claim the power to confer qualified teacher status by continuing to offer Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS) professional formation but as the status is not mandated by legislation and is therefore not stipulated by employers, it has failed to gain traction in the sector. In the 15 years since its introduction, a total 27,000 people have gained the status (ETF 2025) compared to the 81,400 teachers who were teaching in further education in the year 2022 (Education Statistics Service 2023). This lack of traction is evident in that within this group of Veteran practitioners, only Mike and Amy had sought QTLS.

The ambiguity that exists within further education may mask unfair exploitation such as was shown in the gender-based differences seen in the last section and the designation of jobs such as the instructor role as non-teaching. The opacity surrounding further education qualifications can be argued to reinforce the lower status of further education teachers within the wider field of education.

In my interpretation the women in the group had experienced a greater struggle in claiming their positions in the very real institutions that make up further education but also the open-ended designation of 'teacher'. The men had all started paid teaching work before qualification and had their initial teacher training qualification paid for by their employers. In contrast, the women had all done unpaid work to get experience and paid for their own initial training. This gender disparity can be related partly to their relative claims to specialist subject knowledge and the capital

value placed upon those specialisms. It also has to be set within the wider context of a patriarchally biased system of invisible power structures within society that designates traditionally male identified occupations as of more value than traditionally female identified ones.

For Sam and Mike, at the start of their careers, the value of their trade and knowledge brought them greater symbolic capital (Bourdieu 2010). Within further education, vocational trade courses for 16–19-year-olds are the core business and guaranteed to be funded in whatever political climate. For Sam this had meant that he was able to avoid taking a teaching qualification for 10 years. The legislative policy aspect has been previously discussed but the implication that Sam had sufficient confidence as a teacher not to seek qualification may also be linked to the strength of his legitimacy based on the symbolic capital of his vocational knowledge. It is striking that Sam had the least teacher training qualifications but was the most advanced in his career.

Apart from M, all of the participants had continued their studies beyond what they were required to do. Four of the six had Masters' degrees, two in Wendy's case. Mike had done a post-graduate qualification through a university. Continuing to study and develop was evidently beneficial in enhancing their careers, if not in terms of advancement, in terms of keeping motivation. In Amy's case, it allowed her to change direction into digital learning. For Sam, it allowed him to break down the false construct of the vocational / academic divide that had shaped and limited his horizons of choice, to become what he called, 'an accidental academic' (Sam Work-Life Interview) and plan for a future beyond management. For Wendy, it allowed her to teach at post-graduate level and reinforced her pedagogy as a teacher trainer. For Mike it fulfilled a personal need for academic validation, he said

of his university study 'I think that was the bit that was missing' (Mike Narrative Section 9).

It was notable that the participant who was most dissatisfied with their career, was the person who had not taken part in further study. For most of his career, M had taught a subject that he was not qualified for (computing). Having started his working life at 16 in a shipyard, M trained as a photographer, going on to spend nine years as a music industry photographer. His swap to computing was based on the availability of work and he explained, 'if you can programme a camera, you can programme a computer' (M Narrative Section 5). M was able to continue to teach computing perhaps because of his Category A prison teaching context, where access to technology was extremely limited. However, he did not advance in his career (M. Career Map) or take up other development opportunities that may have added variety and interest to his working life. It can be speculated that this career stagnation reinforced his lack of motivation for his work.

### 6.3.3 Qualifications and Skills for Life

The career map data and the narratives showed that many of the qualifications that the participants took were linked to the Skills for Life Strategy (2001-2011) and this historical policy appears to have been an important contextual factor in the women's careers. The impact of the 'pullies and levers' (Gleeson *et al* 2015) of policy and funding on the field of further education and lives of the participants is shown in the data.

The aim, scope and impact of the Skills for Life Strategy was outlined in 2.4. The specialist subject teaching qualifications that the women took were a part of the Skills for Life strategy umbrella. Three of the six participants had been influenced

by the training rules of the strategy. The positive, lasting impact of Skills for Life on the women Veterans was unexpected.

When I first realised the similarities in the careers of the three women participants, I was slightly irritated as I had not been aware of the similarities prior to the interviews. Their jobs at the time of first contact and recruitment to this study were all quite different. I had recruited Amy as a Digital Learning practitioner, Wendy as an ITT teacher and Donna as a maths teacher. I initially felt that the similarities in their careers made my participant group unrepresentative of the sector. However, the narratives showed that the Skills for Life strategy was the significant link in their career pathways. At the start of their careers, two of the women, Wendy and Amy were teaching subjects (ESOL, English and Maths) that were not part of their university studies or qualifications. However, unlike M (who was also teaching a subject he was not qualified in), they went on to take additional specialist teacher training qualifications to underpin their subject knowledge. Donna had also undertaken these qualifications that were part of the Skills for Life strategy aimed at improving the subject knowledge of teachers in further education. Thus, Skills for Life emerged as an unexpected theme for the women in the study.

However, there was a marked difference between the NRDC research (Cara *et al* 2010) explored in Chapter 3 and the women's data. Surprisingly, only 7% of the 1027 Skills for Life teachers interviewed for the Cara *et al* 2010 research between 2004 and 2007 thought that 'increased levels of confidence' (p.96) had been a benefit of the strategy and only 9% recognised the greater opportunities that it had brought them for subject specific qualifications and the chance to become a teacher. With the benefit of hindsight, my female participants gave far more credit to Skills for Life for allowing them a start in further education and giving them a

chance to gain confidence. Donna, Wendy and Amy all spoke about the Skills for Life years as being a high spot in their careers. In Amy's view, the Skills for Life policy period was a high spot for further education and for herself:

I probably started in Skills for Life at its high point. So, there were a lot of resources being thrown into it and there was a lot of work out there and a lot of training (Amy Work-life Interview 2 Q1).

Amy explained that she had taken the opportunities that were offered by the Skills for Life funding.

the Skills for Life thing took you into different strands and so I went off to work in prison on a secondment for three months... I worked in probation though and I really enjoyed that...and worked in the community with people with mental health, I worked with job seekers and I started to work with apprenticeships on there as well (Amy career map conversation).

In policy terms, the funding that Skills for Life brought to further education could be said to have temporarily disrupted the dynamics of the field where the Skills discourse gives vocational subject areas superiority. In personal terms, it gave Amy a temporary respite from precarity. Over her career to date, Amy had had the largest number of jobs of any of the participants but the Skills for Life period gave her the stability of one employer for 12 years, thus facilitating her eventual Veteran status.

Donna's professional status evidently increased as a result of Skills for Life. In her narrative she spoke about the opportunities offered to her to take secondments from her college teaching job into a more regional or even national arena:

when they introduced the new curriculum, I was the trainer who went out. I got paid to go and stay in nice hotels and deliver training elsewhere in the country ...um I applied to be a teacher researcher for the National Research and Development Centre for Literacy and Numeracy, the NRDC, which is defunct now, and so they paid for my time (Donna Narrative Section 8).

These were 'exciting times' for Donna and she felt for further education, 'you know all this stuff going on, all this money, all these organisations. I met so many interesting people' (Donna Narrative Section 8).

The funding for teacher training, practitioner research and for adult learners to take courses had had a clear beneficial impact on the careers of the female participants. All three women were specific that the funding made the difference. Wendy recalled the increase in learner numbers enrolling on the free courses:

we had one year where we were enrolling and the queue for literacy and numeracy... literacy and ESOL predominantly... we were on the second floor, and both sets of stairs had prospective students queueing all the way down to the ground floor (Wendy Narrative Section 17).

It is questionable whether without such funding conditions creating a need for teachers, people like Wendy, Amy and Donna, without subject qualifications would have got a start in teaching in the first place. Skills for Life temporarily made a fissure in the established order of symbolic capital in further education and allowed in people such as these participants who did not fit either the standard stereotype of a middle-class professional or a vocational skills specialist. The funding can also be observed to have temporarily weakened the Skills discourse within further education around the relative value of academic versus practical skills sets. For a

brief window of time, the academic skills the women possessed enjoyed a relatively raised status and allowed them to also consolidate a position within the field.

The women benefitted from the Skills for Life training and from the opportunities it gave them but their memories of the buoyancy and optimism that accompanied it were also influential in their eventual Veteran status. In Moser's conception, the quest to improve adult skills was a 'national and ongoing crusade' (Moser, 1999 p.4). The quasi-evangelical framing of the strategy was reinforced by Tony Blair in his foreword to the review of the strategy so far in 2004, which spoke about the 'urgent challenge to address the literacy and numeracy needs of adults, and in the process, to undo years of neglect' (Blair 2004). The language used echoes Simmons assertion, (cited in 3.3.1), that even when governments espouse social justice, 'the interests of labour and capital are conflated in an unproblematic fashion' (Simmons 2010 p.7). From this, it can be said that the rhetoric was a mask for economic workforce driven purposes but the powerful discourse of righting the wrongs in society can be argued to also have had a lasting impact on my participants in evolving their workplace habitus. That is not to suggest that the commitment to social justice of further education practitioners did not exist prior to Skills for Life or that it disappeared at the end of the funding. However, the higher visibility and recognition that certain defined groups of adults had been unfairly under-served by the education system provided the discourse and formative environment of the women's teaching work. Skills for Life can be said to have had a symbolic power in the careers of the women.

Symbolic power, which can manipulate hopes and expectations, especially through a more or less inspired and uplifting performative evocation of the future - prophecy, forecast or prediction - can introduce a degree of play into

the correspondence between expectations and chances and open up a space of freedom (Bourdieu 2000 p.234).

The opportunity for their formative socialisation of institutional habitus (Bottero 2010) was created by Skills for Life. Each time they took another qualification they were further socialised into the stated aims of the policy of social justice and second chances. It gave them a start in further education and provided funding for opportunities to continue developing their careers. Whilst courses, such as Wendy's popular ESOL classes, garnered money for the institutions, the women enjoyed elevated status within the field.

However, when the policy ended in 2011 and the funding ebbed, the women needed to be flexible and changed with it. They had subsequently taken varied paths and had flexed in response to the changing requirements of the further education workforce. The government money spent on bringing these women into the further education workforce has continued to provide a legacy of Skills for Life dispersed within the sector. The fact that the women had not risen to more senior positions that their qualifications and experience may have warranted will be explored later but the ending of the Skills for Life funding could be said to have closed the brief window of raised status that the women had enjoyed returning them to a marginalised position within the neoliberal Skills discourse where the vocational dominates.

#### 6.4 Theme 3: Professional identity

Understanding the professional identities of the Veterans seems important in understanding *why* they have persevered to reach Veteran status, in what has been shown to be a difficult and precarious career. Whether their self-image has

changed over the period of their career is a more difficult question. As was outlined in the methodology, retrospective narratives such as the data used here, can allow current perspectives to overlay previous ones (Flick 2018). However, in applying Bourdieu's concept of habitus, it can be interpreted that the Veterans' current self-image and choice of narrative content, is the product of previously formed beliefs and experiences.

In this section I present evidence from the data for each individual and make comparisons with the continuum of concepts explored in the Literature Review chapter. The continuum extends from the politicised critical pedagogy of Freire (1970), hooks (2003), McLaren (2012), and Giroux (1989) aimed at social justice and social change at one end, to the instrumentalist Dual Professionalism (ETF 2014), aimed at ensuring that further education continues to produce the next skilled workforce at the other. The middle of this axiological continuum is populated by concepts such as the more practically focused educational justice (Fulford *et al* 2023), transformative teaching and learning (Duckworth and Smith 2018) and relational pedagogy (Noddings 2003). Although the data of the six participants is presented in the main individually, there are also some incidences of overlap or similarity that are explored more collectively.

Donna had perhaps the most developed professional identity located in the principles of critical pedagogy. This was reflected not only in her career decisions but also in the way she spoke about those decisions. She found her niche in teaching disengaged young people; setting up a course to fulfil their needs appeared to have been a formative experience in terms of her professional identity. For Donna her career, from then on, focused on disadvantaged young people. For example, she explained a turning point in her career:

there was a move to make most of the vocational courses have entrance requirements for maths and English so lots of the students were being sent to us just for maths and English were 16 years old, because at that time you didn't have to be in full time education...just to do maths and English, you know they didn't have to do anything else, for a few hours a week because they wanted to join a vocational course, and they would have to wait around until the next intake [September]. So that seemed awful so we set up the E to FE [Entry to Further Education]. So that was all these young people who for whatever reason hadn't achieved any qualifications in school. Quite often because of their behaviour but lots of other reasons, could be autism, or anything. So, I was the co-ordinator and worked with all these young people so when I moved to Adult Ed I really missed working with young people (Donna Narrative Section 11)

Her explanation of setting up the 'E to FE' (Entry to Further Education) course was one of the longest passages in her narrative and was spoken in a flowing, upbeat tone. My interpretation is that her professional identity is tied to a personal agenda of social justice is reinforced in Section 10 of her narrative, where she decided not to stay in a management role in community adult education because she wanted to get back to working with young people. Donna spoke volubly (Donna Narrative Sections 14-21) about her current employment where she teaches maths to 16-19 year-old learners who do not fit with other sorts of provision. Her present position allows her to operate within her own ethical parameters.

Donna's reasons for persisting in further education are explicit throughout her career map, narrative and interview. For example, in the interview, she explained a one year break in her further education career map, when she had left a GFE college to work

in a school. Her explanation of the break is interesting. The job could have been a positive move for her. Her subject area of maths and her skills in managing challenging behaviour, gave her greater capital within the school system than it had in further education. She was working with similar young people which should have satisfied her axiological focus of educational justice (Fulford *et al* 2023). However, using the equation of [(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice (Bourdieu 1984 p.101), the habitus of the field is shown to be an important variable in producing a clash between her professional identity and the school environment. Donna explained:

On the first day of working at X Academy there was this woman who came round with a bottle of nail varnish remover and some cotton wool and I instinctively put my hands behind my back! [laughing] I was expected to make them take their nail varnish off! (Donna Interview Q.3).

She clearly did not find a comfortable match between her own habitus and the institutional habitus (Reay 2010) of the school, experiencing what has been referred to as habitus clivé (Bourdieu 2000) or ‘disjuncture in the dispositional matrix of an individual’ (Ivemark 2023 p.945). She appeared to identify more closely with the learners than finding any collegiate common ground with the staff. At the interview stage, Donna explained further the difference she saw between further education and school.

I like working in FE, it is the variety of people in FE. That’s why I had a problem teaching in a school because school teachers are very different to FE teachers on the whole. There were some people who were great but they have all been to school, been to university, done their teacher training and gone back to school. They think everybody loves school. They have a certain outlook. Whereas at (name of organisation) we’ve got a right old

motley crew from all sorts of backgrounds...I like that and I think it's a good mix for the students (Donna Work-life interview Q9).

It might appear a little unfair of Donna to stereotype school teachers but she is essentially critiquing the 'dominator culture' (hooks 2003) that she experienced in the school and foregrounding her belief that learners who have been under-served by society, need role models who can identify with their experience and challenge the what hooks saw as a 'damaging hegemony' (hooks 2003 p.8). Donna locates herself within a pedagogy of hope (Freire 1994, hooks 2003):

The kids I teach have been kicked out of everywhere anyway. They expect to be kicked out and the whole point of us is to try and keep them (Donna Interview Q.3).

Donna sees her work as enabling learners to redefine themselves as being able to succeed in education by breaking the cycle of rejection. Donna stood out in her critical reflection on her work, for example when trying to explain why teaching in school did not suit her, she cited the 'different power relationship... this absolute sort of control' (Donna Narrative Section 14) that the school expected and she felt she could not or would not adapt to. Her conscious rejection of the power dynamic may be an example of critical pedagogy (Nouri & Sajjadi 2014). She was conscious of her disposition and her ethical boundaries. Once Donna was able to find employment that matched her social justice values, she was able to sustain her engagement with her work and enabled her veteran-ness.

Similarly, Mike is conscious of how his life experiences have influenced his construction of his professional identity and his axiology as a teacher.

I think it is really useful to see the shit side of life, kip under a car in the January rain, to realise how tough people's lives are. I was on the verge of spending a long, long time in institutions [prison] but got away from it, but I wouldn't be the teacher I am today if I hadn't been through that (Mike Work-life Interview Q5).

For Donna and Mike particularly, educational justice (Fulford *et al* 2023) for specific under-served groups, had been the nexus around which their careers revolved. However, even for these two participants, whether their professional identities are well-developed enough to be defined as a critical pedagogy consciously aimed at a more socially just society is arguable (Giroux 1989, Nouri & Sajjadi 2014). Their narratives showed that the change that they sought to make was focused quite narrowly on specific groups of disengaged young people. The narrowness of their focus may lack the wider vision of society but can be seen as activist in that their commitment to these groups is a conscious and highly personal decision. They had both been, 'attentive to those places and practices in which social agency has been denied' (Giroux 2020 p.2) in that they had attempted to give at least some, however limited, vision of agency to their learner groups.

Mike spoke movingly about his own commitment to giving learners transformative learning experiences. For example, he recalled the challenge of trying to change the perspectives of learners to allow them to see themselves as able to succeed.

if I said you've done that great, they would start chucking bricks at you. I can totally relate to that with those kids (Mike interview).

His attitude matches well with elements of the concept of critical pedagogy in that he sought:

the subversion and rejection of negative labels by students and the re-working of learning identities to gain hope and pathways forward (Duckworth and Smith 2019 p.28).

Both Donna and Mike chose to focus on younger learners who arguably have the potential to benefit most from the 'rejection of negative labels' (*ibid.*) that a positive educational experience can bring about.

Mike's choice to move away from management, taking a pay cut in order to work more directly with underserved learners again, is a very solid example of his commitment to a social justice aligned professional identity. He clearly rejects the instrumentalist skills trainer identity.

In this sub-story, Mike is racing a learner up the fire-escape of a tower block building:

this little angry kid and he was tiny, reminded me of me when I was a kid, really angry all of the time, very aggressive, if you looked at him, he would be 'what are you looking at?' you know that sort of thing. I remember going out the back there after him when he used to kick off and I'd be saying, 'it's going to be alright' and he'd be saying, 'fuck off' and I'd be, 'come on back in you'll be fine...' He said, 'What's in that door?' so I said, 'There are stairs and a lift' and he said, 'I could beat anybody up those stairs' and I said, 'Do you reckon? Come on then catch me' and I ran through, not the done thing I know, but I was running up the stairs and he was grabbing me back. I let him get past me, he was so little only 14. I got to the top and I was coughing my lungs up. I thought my heart was going to come out of my chest and he was sitting on the top step laughing. There was a little moment there where

there was acceptance and you thought you had got through to him (Mike Narrative Section 7).

There is something joyous about this memory. In his narrative Mike recalled these small successes which he kept as treasures that meant a great deal to him. Mike's choice to share this memory, allows a glimpse of his practice and his motivations.

Bourdieu saw practice as the product of habitus multiplied by capital with field added to that result (Bourdieu 1984). In this example, it is difficult to define capital and habitus as separate terms. Mike's capital, through subject knowledge and job role, is vital in that it allows him to be in the position to enact his practice but his embodied cultural capital through lived class experience and habitus is what allowed him to communicate with the learners. In terms of the equation [(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice (Bourdieu 1984 p.101), the field of further education should perhaps be assigned a lower number. The expectations of the field inherent to Mike's teacher training, did not moderate or normalise his practise. The process of 'examination' through training and 'hierarchical observation' (Foucault 1977 p.138) should have standardised Mike's behaviour but evidently did not work.

Mike's habitus is shown to be a stronger influence in that he continued with his own approach to teaching. The narrative above shows Mike was far from a didactic 'talk and chalk' style of teacher, providing a 'knowledge rich' curriculum (Gibb 2021).

The overwhelming influence of Mike's habitus on his practice also perhaps obscures any outward looking societal aim moving his identity from social justice to educational justice for the individual (Fulford *et al* 2023). His focus was on establishing a connection of 'relational care' (Noddings 1984 p. 63) with his learner and he acted in accordance with that focus resulting in a moment of recognition

from the learner of a barrier broken. He was willing to break rules and do something quite dangerous to get to what he thought was important.

This incident of Mike's 'relational care' (Noddings 1984) may be a small and lack any overt aim of societal change but it does connect firmly to Giroux's pedagogical link of the personal and the political.

I believe it is crucial for educators... to connect classroom knowledge to the experiences, histories, and resources that students bring to the classroom (Giroux 2020 p.5).

Mike certainly connected with the 'experiences' and 'histories' of the learners. His own history allowed him to see past the aggressive behaviours they presented with, to a future of 'hope'. However, his scope to educate learners to become 'critical agents' for wider societal issues would seem limited (Giroux 2020 p.5). The learners he was teaching had been excluded from mainstream schooling and Mike's immediate concern was to offer them a pathway away from being excluded from society completely, in the way that he had experienced himself, through incarceration.

For Amy, her personal history and habitus was central to her professional identity. She said,

I really care about education because I know what it can do, if you get it right, I know what it can do and what difference it can make to people's lives....and I also come from a background where education's not valued at all in my family...at all...and they don't understand what I do or why I've done it. But I know that there will be other kids out there that have families that don't understand and don't care so they need someone to show them

that it's important and that person is their teacher, isn't it? (Amy Work-life Interview 1 Q.4)

However, Amy's connection between her disposition as a teacher is not preconscious and unquestioned as Bourdieu might have suggested (1977) but rather reflexively examined and foregrounded by her to explain her commitment to social justice through education. She was equally as clear about her personal connection to adult learner groups:

I think people who have been through FE themselves as mature students that's where the passion comes from because I really understand what a difference it made to my life (Amy Work-life Interview 1).

The use of the word 'passion' indicates the depth of empathy she has regarding her learners and explains her axiological position. Her personal history has produced a specific disposition that has allowed her to retain her motivation.

However, Amy had difficulties in the post Skills for Life era re-aligning her own identity, as a teacher of marginalised adult learners, to find the same satisfaction working with younger learners (this will be explored more fully in the next section). Frustrated by management regimes, she made the decision to stay in further education but to give up teaching and become a digital coach for other teachers rather than to continue teaching young people and compromising her own ideals.

M also found tensions between his own professional ideals and that of his employers. He expressed some values that align with critical pedagogy but was also frustrated in his attempts to enact his ideals in a way that suggests the disposition that he evolved early in his career working in community education

clashed with the institutional habitus of the prison system producing a habitus clivé (Bourdieu 1984).

M described having frequent clashes with his employers.

So you get that sort of fight backwards and forwards, it gets quite narky at times as well, 'you get me a computer and I'll sit down and do it for you' 'No I'm just on a visit' 'well it won't get done until tomorrow then' 'well that's not the attitude... [laughing] Grrrrrr...I'm going to kill somebody, I'm going to end up in there with them [the prisoners] (M Narrative Section 14).

However, his frustration does seem to be based on his perception that he is being prevented from acting in the way he feels is professional within his own ethical construct.

Slowly but surely, it has gone from the journey, the boys' journey, into some sort of self-realisation, into bums on seats. The people who get left behind, get left behind. Most of the boys will start and then get through to week three or four and quit and say I just can't do it anymore, I haven't the brains...you know that sort of idea. But they just aren't given the time for me to help (M. Narrative Section12).

He rejects the performativity of targets (Avis 2003) and batching of the learners to get them through his class in six-week blocks as instrumentalist, what he calls 'bums on seats'. Statistics for his computing course would show that his classes had been open to more learners meaning his 'productivity' was increased but M resists this instrumentalist construct of success. Above, he explains that he feels that the learners' journey to 'self-realisation' is what is of value which does suggest empowerment. He mentions the low self-esteem of some of the learners and his

desire to 'help' them but whether this desire goes as far as critical pedagogy is questionable. In the quote below, M gives more evidence that he that he rejects the instrumentalist construct of his work, explaining that within a context of long-term imprisonment, promoting a skills-based agenda was a pointless illusion.

I had a guy come into my Level 1 class, he was about 45, I asked him 'when do you get out?' '...when I'm 80'. We have people who have 50-year sentences. They are learning IT now, who knows what IT will be like in 50 years' time (M Work-life interview Q2).

Although he was teaching computing, the prisoners in M's prison had very limited access to IT outside of his lessons. Some who were doing Open University courses were allowed controlled access but for everyone else there was no access at all (M. Work-life interview Q1). The supposed reason for the courses was to learn skills the prisoners will need on release to gain work (Ministry of Justice 2025). However, M points out that this is not a realistic aim for many.

He gives another positive indicator when he reveals his involvement and identification with the lot of the prisoners, putting himself in their place when picking out examples of their powerlessness and lack of choice. When speaking about why he has stayed in the profession, his language use reveals how he sees the prisoners.

It's the people, it's always been the people. It's not the money, it's not the management [laughs with ironic tone]. It's the staff as well, I've always worked with really good staff (M. Narrative Section 6).

When referring to 'people' it becomes evident that he means his students, the prisoners, not his colleagues. This was confirmed when he said, 'the staff as well.'

He seems to elevate the prisoners to the status of individual 'people' but his colleagues are grouped together as 'staff'. M's rejection of 'negative labels' starts to approach a 'transformative' (Duckworth and Smith 2019) approach. For M teaching IT in the prison, is not really about prisoners learning IT. The value of his work is providing the 'journey,' the relationship building and allowing the learners to achieve a recognised piece of paper for their own self-esteem rather than getting them ready to get a job in an IT company. His frustration at the seeming absence of recognition of the special circumstances has brought him into conflict with his managers due to his sometimes seemingly unprofessional behaviour.

The difference between the way M spoke about his early teaching work for the charity in Scotland teaching photography (in 5.3.2), and the way he spoke about his current work was marked. The vast majority of his narrative and interview were given over to explaining his frustration with the bureaucracy of the prison system. For M his Veteran status has brought with it a cynicism about his work.

Superficially, his attitude does mirror the career stages categorised by Day and Sammon (2006), that predicted that teachers would experience 'Work-life tensions: Challenges to motivation and commitment' from 16-23 years in an increasing downward spiral towards retirement. Although for M, his tension is between his axiological position and the institutional habitus and what this means for his practice as a teacher.

It is not possible to see M as a proponent of critical pedagogy in the sense of McLaren's 'revolutionary pedagogy' (McLaren & Kumar 2012) or as a practice of freedom (Freire 1994). In a literal sense, he is unable to offer liberation through education. However, the evidence shows how strongly he rejects instrumentalist constructs. M's intrinsic motivation for teaching had not changed over time but his

power to fulfil what he saw as his purpose had changed. To apply the formula of '[(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice' (Bourdieu 1984, p.101), M's position within the field had been diminished due to a loss of cultural capital linked to his unwillingness to teach in a performative manner. His personal habitus in his axiological aim to provide, however limited, elements of educational justice (Fulford *et al* 2023) to the prisoners, no longer matched the aims of the institution due to the creep of managerialism. The result had been a change in his professional identity and his practice from being innovative and creative to stubborn and seen by his employer as disruptive. The constraints of his working environment and perhaps his lack of critical reflection on his own practice have prevented him from fulfilling the 'helping' role that he sees as his professional purpose.

Wendy and Sam appear to be more instrumentalist and externally facing in their self-images of professionalism. The sense of the pragmatic and the dominance of the needs of the organisation prevailed. There is perhaps a resonance of the professionalism versus professionalism dichotomy. Hoyle (1975) saw professionalism as being the knowledge and skills required for a job as opposed to the status positioning of professionalism. Wendy and Sam's narratives focus on explaining how they do their jobs to the best of their ability rather than positioning themselves axiologically.

Sam's grudging acceptance of the prevailing neoliberal discourse regarding the financial measurement of the worth of his work in further education is shown throughout his narrative. However, rather than being a sub-conscious influence, Sam displays a reflexive consciousness of how the dominance of the neoliberal discourse is limiting him. When he wanted to explain why he is proud of what he regards as his career successes, he was aware that his ability to describe it was

limited but he could not find an alternative discourse to draw on. He said, 'I know I shouldn't talk about things in monetary values but it is probably the only benchmark that I've got' (Sam Narrative Section 7).

For example, when explaining why turning around a department judged as unsuccessful had been a particular high-point for him, he only had evidence of financial success to draw on.

I think we had about £3m income as a department and within three years we were at £6m. It made the whole centre vibrant we got a really, really popular adult offer, we have gone from 7 adults to 300 adults on everything from bricklaying to mechanics and electrical programmes. That has been a really big high! (Sam Narrative Section 7).

His choice of what is being celebrated through business style language reinforces the neoliberal discourse of further education as a marketplace. The money and the turn-over are what make it a success. The narrowness of focus may also reflect the isolation of his management role. He is not having regular contact with the learners or seeing the individual changes being made in their lives by learning new skills.

His 'benchmark' of impact is numerical rather than the more personal examples of the adults, that he mentions above, getting jobs that change the prospects for their families or seeing the younger learners changing their behaviours and growing into productive adults. There is depersonalisation towards finance. This is a significant shift away from the individual transformation of educational justice (Fulford *et al* 2023) or wider social justice goals (Giroux 2020). To apply the formula '[(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice' (Bourdieu 1984, p.101), By the time of the narrative, Sam's professional identity and practice had evolved from his beginnings as an electrical lecturer to adopt the habitus of management. He had increased his

capital but as his field position rose he had distanced himself from pedagogical practice.

Wendy's professional identity was also focused on her worth to the employer:

the one thing I can say is I am well respected across the organisation from right at the top to all the way down (Wendy Narrative Section 13).

However, it was for reasons of job security (which will be explored further in Theme 4). She had gained the relevant knowledge, competence, and qualification within the field that should have brought her the comfort of accumulated capital and status but it can be inferred that Wendy's story within further education was complicated by her experience of tacit and overt racism and the way that had influenced her self-concept. In attaining management positions and becoming a teacher educator, she had achieved a prominent role in her organisation. Lander and Santoro's 2017 study of non-white teacher educators observed feelings of 'hypervisibility' of being in such an overtly influential role. The participants in the 2017 study felt that they had to constantly prove their competence to colleagues and hierarchies (Lander and Santoro 2017 p.1013). Wendy was perhaps resisting the discourse of hypervisibility by being what an employer would regard as the consummate professional. The quote above shows the pride she had in having gained the respect of colleagues.

For Sam and Wendy, their professional suggest a comfort with performativity where they are able to find continuing pride and purpose in their work through performing their roles well within the parameters set by the employers from above.

The concept of Dual Professionalism (ETF 2014) that was shown in the literature to be a did not emerge from the data as an identifiable construct for the Veterans. The

participants in this study are a tiny sample and there is no suggestion intended that issues of 'skills fade' and keeping current with their original vocational areas is not problematic for many vocational teachers. Within the 'Skills discourse' of further education, teachers can be assumed to be only as useful as their vocational skills, putting them under pressure to stay up to date with their industry. This genuine concern was shown in the Literature Review to be a real worry for some vocational teachers (Beetlestone 2019).

With that limitation fully acknowledged, for these Veteran practitioners, it can be argued that their original vocational identities were overtaken by their teacher identity and over time. These changes appeared employ but perhaps extend beyond the morphogenesis that Esmond (2017) observed in the grafting of a teacher identity onto an existing vocational identity to form the dual professional. My data showed that participants' specialist subjects changed or became supplemented by additional specialisms over time. For the women, their academic subject areas became multiple and interchangeable. For the men, who were the vocational specialists and could potentially have found more of their experience reflected in Dual Professionalism, their careers took them in directions that rendered their original subject identities if not irrelevant, then certainly secondary.

It was notable, that apart from the start of the narrative when he was remembering his interview and first appraisal (Mike Narrative section 1), Mike did not mention his subject area skills at all. The idea of the 'Dual Professional' (ETF 2014) does not feature. The skills that he valued were his pedagogical skills and he appeared to see his re-engagement work as a specialist subject in itself.

Sam did credit his skills-based identity with lending him a useful legitimacy when his institution was looking for redundancies (Sam Work-life interview Q2). It is

however, a little misleading to conflate Sam's management identity as a former electrical teacher with 'Dual Professionalism' as he had left his subject teaching far behind by that point in his career.

Even for M, who had stayed as a teacher of a specific vocational subject, a Dual Professional identity could not be applied. Whether M kept his computing skills concurrent with industry was irrelevant to his day-to-day work. His environment meant he could not teach up-to-date skills to his learners.

The 'Dual Professional' model was not therefore found to be useful in explaining the long-term professional identities of the participants. The ability to morph into an individual, hybrid identity maybe an important feature of veteran-ness.

In terms of the axiological continuum of professional identity, the data showed that the participants did not fit exactly with any of the theories on the continuum but rather showed elements of several. Even Sam and Wendy who I have classified as being more performative in their professional identity, were steeped in a discourse of what Bathmaker and Avis (2013) called 'moral involvement' and a 'sense of service' (p.734/5). Sam spoke with great concern about the impact of the pandemic on learners, their mental health and the growth of safeguarding incidents, 'so much this year that we have spent far more time dealing with student issues than we have educating students' (Sam Work-life interview). Wendy's ambition from the start had been to teach on an Access course and replicate the experience of change that she had had herself, 'those were the sorts of values that I took on board as a teacher' (Wendy Narrative Section 5).

Ball (2003) is helpful in establishing the emotional tensions of teachers caught between their ideals and the need to comply with expectations.

The ground of such struggles is often highly personal. Expressed in the lexicons of belief and commitment, service and even love, and of mental health and emotional well-being. The struggles are often internalized and set the care of the self against duty to others (Ball 2003 p.216).

This emotive picture matches well with the data gathered from the Veterans who all showed a clear emotional connection to their work. For all, there was an identification with the lives of their learners that reinforced the Veterans' commitment to their work. Their emotional connection can be interpreted as based on their early habitus in terms of socio-economic beginnings. However, their professional identity and axiological position as a teacher that generated their practice and directed career decisions, evolved further over time through life experiences and then their early teaching experiences reinforcing their emotional connections to their work.

Five of the six participants mentioned their own time in further education as learners as being formative of their professional identities either through modelling (Sam and Wendy) or through the transformative experience it offered them (Amy). For Mike, his incarceration as a youth was the pivotal experience that framed his connection to troubled young people. Similarly for Donna, the positive experience, early in her career, of working with disengaged young people was a seminal event that became part of how her professional identity evolved and her personal, enduring axiology emerged. For M, his work, early in his career, with unemployed people set a precedent that framed his later frustration.

Over time, the Veterans had to make difficult choices between adopting habitus norms to gain social integration within the institution or maintaining their own axiological position and remaining congruent with their evolved professional

identity. For Mike, his move into management left him separated from learners and his *raison d'être*. For Amy, Donna and M they were, at some points in their careers, judged to be non-compliant with an employer's view point. They had to struggle to resist challenges to their own constructed identities that brought them into direct conflict with employers who had differing views of what was ethical or professional.

#### 6.5 Theme 4: Sustaining a career in precarious employment conditions

This theme explores the longevity of the Veterans and addresses the main question of the study in trying to ascertain how they have sustained their careers; how they have negotiated the powerful forces that subtly, or overtly, direct and shape their working lives. The data collected in the career map conversations, narratives and interviews showed that all the participants have negotiated multiple difficulties which made their employment, at times, precarious. The evidence presented in this theme gives more weight to the argument that precarity operates as a symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1999) to control and direct people's career pathways in that they accept instability as a necessary and inevitable element of the further education environment. Here, I start to examine the workplace precarity and question the way that direct government decisions interact with institutional power and individual intersectional characteristics to produce working conditions that keeps some of the Veterans in an almost constant state of apprehension. This theme will explore the factors that made their working environment so challenging and trace those challenges back to their origins. I will also explore the strategies, or perhaps happenstances, that allowed them to maintain their careers.

The Literature Review and Context chapter showed how further education has been subject to constant change due to 'policy churn' (Gleeson *et al* 2015) and changes of political agendas over decades. 'Policy churn', in turn instigates a constantly changing

landscape for further education providers to try and adapt to. Funding, alongside audit and inspection were suggested by the literature to have been the 'pulleys and levers' (Gleeson *et al* 2015 p.4) that keep further education in line with the government of the day's intended direction. Smith and Duckworth (2022 p.18) refer to 'funding, accountability and performance' as a 'FAP apparatus' which they say is a 'key determiner of how further and adult education is experienced'. Using these mechanical metaphors is useful in looking for the dynamics of the field that produced the environment in which the participants worked.

The influence of funding changes could be seen at work in the careers of the participants with often unpredictable consequences. As discussed in the Context chapter, further education funding differs from that of schools or higher education in its variety and complexity. Funding agencies are different dependent on the age, level and type of course. Government commissioned research has called further education funding 'fragmented and unpredictable' (Lewis and Bolton 2022 p.8). It can be argued that the complexity in funding results in a 'lower level of public scrutiny' (Norris and Adam 2017 p.10) that accompanies the frequent policy changes in further education. The labyrinthine complexity of funding makes it too difficult to explain in snappy media pieces thus quite radical changes can be made without any public outcry. When changes occurred, the participants, were forced to adapt their working life to suit the changed conditions.

For example, in the themes on Beginning and Qualification, the impact of Skills for Life funding on the female members of the group was shown. Unsurprisingly, the end of Skills for Life funding in 2010-11 and the beginning of 'austerity' was significant for some of the participants. When looking at the intersections of power, the role of the economic crisis of 2008 must be acknowledged but then the very direct power of

government and how they decide to rearrange state finances according to political ideology comes into view. Decisions about what to cut cannot be seen as value-free. Government papers from the start of the Coalition administration of 2010 show how radical the funding cuts at the time were.

Over the period of this Spending Review (SR), [from 2010] up to 2014-15, the further education resource budget will be reduced by 25%. Dealing with these reductions will be a challenge and individuals, training organisations and colleges will have to adapt to change (Department of Business Innovation and Skills 2010 p.4).

Reflecting a changed emphasis of government away from adult education, the 25% overall funding reduction was not equally distributed across all areas of further education. The 16-18 age group, saw an overall drop of 14% in the period between 2010 and 2020 (Lewis and Bolton 2022) but adult education saw even more radical drops in funding.

Funding for adults fell by two-thirds in real terms than in 2003–04 and about 50% lower than in 2009–10. Funding was entirely removed from some courses and adult further education loans introduced which resulted in falling numbers (Farquharson *et al.* 2021 p.21).

Amy, who had found her niche teaching under-served adult learners, found herself immediately impacted by cuts to adult learning budgets. Amy recalls that in 2010:

funding for adult education started to get smaller and ... they were looking to reduce the adult department and move people over to [16-18] Functional Skills...I was moved over without too much consultation about it. That was a bit of a blow (Amy Narrative Section 5).

Amy was completely powerless in this situation but her institution had to follow the funding and restructure the organisation to move staff around to create a new curriculum offer or make them redundant. As a 'business' keeping courses where the funding has been reduced so radically would be the same as continuing a product line that is not selling. The flaw in the marketized metaphor being that in the case of adult learning, the 'customers' did still want and need the product.

Restructuring starts to emerge from the data as an expected and accepted way that the precarity is generated. The practice of institutional restructuring was mentioned by four of the six participants. The word 'restructure' is part of the normalised sectorial terminology but it is used to describe anything from major sectoral changes such as the college mergers brought about by the area reviews of 2016-2019 (BIS 2016) to an internal institutional decision to merge departments. In the quote above, Amy has rationalised the college's decision-making as being a localised reaction to national funding changes. The turbulence produced seems regrettable but necessary, illustrating how neoliberalisation visits symbolic violence on both students and staff. The continual restructuring within further education produces conditions of instability where the workforce is habituated and conditioned to expect precarious conditions and come to see themselves as expendable and powerless.

Amy's strategy of building up qualifications to try and give herself more job security did not protect her from the unwanted change. Sadly, she found the forced move into teaching 16-18 year olds unsustainable (for reasons to be explored later) and used the only agentive option open to her by leaving the job. Unfortunately, that decision started her on an eight-year period of job insecurity. Of all the participants, Amy had experienced the most precarity. Her career took her through more areas of the sector than any of the other participants. She told me about eight employers; within that,

there was a variety of settings including four colleges, a local authority and private training providers.

For Amy, the equation of '[(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice' (Bourdieu 1984, p.101) was disrupted by funding changes. Her field position was reduced initially by the funding changes causing a devaluation of her adult specialism. Her institutional cultural capital in the form of qualifications and experience and her embodied cultural capital in the form of her teaching skills did not compensate for the changed funding conditions. Her habitus in the form of her axiology remained the most constant influence on her practice but the strength of her commitment to adult learners perhaps made it more difficult for her to find a sustainable job in the unstable conditions.

In the same year that Amy was being restructured away from the job she loved, in another part of the country, Wendy was also being faced with unwanted changes. She recalled:

In 2010 we had yet another restructure and the role that I had at that time was literacy, numeracy and ESOL, GCSE English and Access to HE. So, the job had grown and at that time in 2010 they decided to add what was then our Alternative Provision [14–16-year-olds excluded from school]. When they decided to merge the roles, I physically couldn't have taken on any more (Wendy career map conversation).

The power here appears to lie with the organisation but the date's correlation to funding cuts is shown to be significant. It marked the start of a 'real terms cut of 60 per cent' of ESOL funding between 2010 and 2016 (Marsden 2018). The policy and funding apparatus controlled by government is the source of the churn directing local change. However, Wendy had been through more 'restructures' than any other

participant suggesting that her employers were generating more precarity than others facing the same funding cuts. The way that local organisations respond to nationally changed funding levels is contextualised and the amalgamation of so many very different functions into one job seems extraordinary, ill-conceived and likely to force further change later. Wendy's personal agency in the situation is limited but she had the presence of mind not to agree to an unmanageable job, potentially contributing to her Veteran status. She had the option to move within the organisation and took it. The move away from ESOL was one that Wendy wanted rather than being forced but funding changes perhaps constructed the route by which she travelled.

Mike's narrative showed that even quite subtle changes to funding rules can result in large changes in the delivery of programmes for learners and hence the work of teachers. He had found his niche teaching pre-16 learners. Many of his learners came to college via pupil referral units or schools where they spent most of their week, attending college one day a week to learn practical building skills. In 2015 the change in pre-16 skills funding allowed schools to deliver the skills training themselves thus effectively ending colleges' involvement and Mike's role. Mike explained:

The government used to offer the funding for the pre-16s to the college directly and we subsidised it a bit from the college but then they turned round and gave it back to the schools to use as Alternative Curriculum so obviously it's going to be really hard for them not to use that funding for the school (Mike Work-life interview Q2).

Although, he obviously felt regret about the change in policy, he didn't show any anger or blame government or the schools. There was an implied acceptance that these changes were inevitable. His lack of reaction, can be said to be an example

of how Mike normalised the precarity of working in further education. Mike's long experience of further education has brought him to expect these types of policy changes. The truth of his experience is 'established, settled once and for all, beyond discussion' (Bourdieu, 2000 p.174). While he accepts the normalised structural impact of neoliberalisation/marketisation, this contrasts with his resistant practice as a teacher. Both show adaptation, but he can only assert agency in his practice which remain anchored in a personalised set of values.

Sam had a different perspective on alterations to funding due to his senior management position. His technological vocational areas had benefitted from funding changes that favoured the funding of apprenticeships but he was concerned about the funding that was being ploughed into T levels and the proposed de-funding of other Level 3 qualifications. He was able to give commentary on changes that were still unfolding at the time of the data collection (2022).

I spent quite a lot of time at the DfE (Department for Education), probably been backwards and forwards eight or nine times to discuss the T levels right at the early bits and all the things that we said then, they have still just pushed ahead with and now we are fighting those challenges. We could see that back in 2018 (Sam Work-Life Interview Q5).

Sam's sense of himself as having a respected professional status is demonstrated here when his opinion was sought by government but this is shown to be limited when, frustratingly, his feedback was subsequently ignored. The power to drive through unwanted changes, creating more 'churn' and precarity lies within the government department. In contrast to Mike, Sam does not accept the policy changes as inevitable and does speak about 'fighting'. His 'fight' might ultimately

be fruitless but Sam again shows a strategy that has contributed to his Veteran status. He has sought to understand the system and get prepared for change. In the world of a neoliberalised marketplace of learning providers, being ahead of competitors and ready to adjust to follow the funding could be the difference in keeping not only himself but his staff in work.

Policy and the funding that follows it, both exert an overt power but also a semi-hidden one in the careers of the Veterans. They control the availability of jobs and may have influenced the Veterans in ways that they have not recognised. When someone decides to look for a job, they can only apply for what is on offer at the time and funding undoubtedly has an influence on what is on offer. We imagine we are making a free choice in our pathways but our choices are always limited by the context created by the 'pulleys and levers' of funding policy.

Bearing in mind the instability of funding, it was something of a surprise that only two actual redundancies had happened within the Veteran group but fear of redundancy and fear of unemployment was present in all the narratives. Again, this adds to the picture of how precarity is accepted and expected within further education. In an article in the online magazine '*FE Week*' in 2023 they report the results of an employment tribunal for a teacher at a large college in England judged to have been selected for redundancy unfairly. The claimant is quoted as saying 'In 25 years, I had undergone numerous redundancy procedures; they hang over lecturers' heads like an annual guillotine' (Noble 2023 n.p.). The vivid simile is useful for understanding the level of precarity experienced by staff in further education. It is doubtful that redundancy procedures were actually an 'annual' event but to this Veteran practitioner, it had felt constant.

Amy was made redundant from an independent training provider where she taught English and Maths to railway apprentices. She recalled the sudden and dramatic end to her job.

One day we went into work and there was a group of people in a line, literally, a horizontal line in suits, that said 'your company has gone into administration, you are all out of work' ...It was over like that, over-night. I was really devastated (Amy Narrative Section 10).

This event shows the different level of precarious employment experienced by some further education teachers in comparison to that of a school teacher. The marketisation of further education means that often small, or narrowly focused businesses that provide further education training are financially vulnerable. Amy's narrative gave no clues to the cause of the bankruptcy of the independent training provider she was working for and it may have been due to mismanagement rather than funding changes. She explained:

I took my next job it was back in college. I had two part time jobs. One teaching Access and one teaching Functional Skills so it was a bit of a balance, I was also doing a bit out in the community (Amy Narrative Section 11).

This shows how, after 19 years of teaching, she was still having to piece together roles to provide a full-time wage.

M was the second Veteran who had been through redundancy from his community teaching role in 2007:

I taught grannies and people like that... we taught them basic computing, word processing and that sort of thing. Eventually I got made redundant from that (M Career map conversation).

The local council employer had decided to stop the provision. Although he soon found a job in a college, he feared another redundancy. He found the job security that he was looking for by moving into prison teaching but he described this career move in a negative way.

it was just they needed the people and I needed the money. It wasn't my first choice shall we say (M. Narrative Section 3).

Here he is dismissive of his entry into prison teaching although it became the most extensive part of his working life. His recollection may have been influenced by how he currently feels about his work. M's narrative suggests that it was a transactional move rather than a wish to enter the work. The final sentence is loaded with suggestion. The '...shall we say' ending hangs, suggesting that he had many other things that he would rather have done and he has been forced into it out of necessity. M's career before teaching had been characterised by insecurity. He had even been forced to go back to the ship-yard at one point which he 'swore I never would' (M. career map conversation). Job security was more important to him than taking a risk in moving out of prison teaching to a job he might have been happier in.

Although others in the participant group had avoided redundancy, the threat of redundancy was an evident feature in the careers of both Sam and Wendy. Sam's more senior position had protected him from the precarity produced by restructuring to an extent but not completely. He was able to avoid redundancy but had to go through the unpleasant process of competing against colleagues for the remaining role. It is

notable that his colleagues, who were also senior managers, did not avoid redundancy. Sam explained:

we had a restructure last year (2021) and it had gone down to two heads of faculty. One was moved to another department, two were made redundant and there were just two of us left (Sam Work-life interview Q 2).

Sam credited his construction subject background for his survival. His former skill is seen as more valuable than the former skills of the other candidates, even though it is a senior management position which does not involve any actual construction.

The people who got made redundant, their backgrounds were in hairdressing and business. So, in the end they voluntarily put up, when they saw the areas that I ran, they said, well I can't do that. So, I have been lucky (Sam Work-life interview Q 2).

He does not mention the gender of the other candidates but that may also have been a compounding factor in a person with a hairdressing background deciding not to enter a contest for a job managing a predominantly male department. Nonetheless, the symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1999) of precarity through restructuring can be seen in operation in Sam's experience. He sees himself as 'lucky' and is grateful that the other two people pulled out of the competition but he is acutely aware of the market value of the symbolic capital of his trade background and the prestige that carries within further education. The skills of organising staff and managing systems can have little relation to having once been an electrician or a hairdresser but he knew that in further education it carries capital in the way he is viewed. The organisation forced him to compete in a way he found demoralising but he was still able to win the competition.

Sam's longevity seemingly owes a lot to his ability to adapt, work out the 'rules of the game' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p.168) and perform in the required way.

Restructuring, as a way of reshaping an organisation to suit altered funding or policy priorities, is a regular feature of further education working-life. The experience of threatened redundancy and removal of agency is at the least unsettling. The restructuring of colleges was a visible mechanism that had moved around four of the Veterans. Some, like Sam and Mike had benefitted from a restructure, others like Amy had not.

Of all the Veterans, restructuring had impacted most on Wendy's working life. Wendy had worked for one GFE employer for 22 years but had had to survive at least four institutional restructures with staff redundancies. Each time Wendy had to apply for new or slightly altered roles. She recalled that:

In 2006 the whole staff cohort were made redundant. We all had to apply for our jobs (Wendy career map conversation).

It is hard to imagine this happening in a school. Wendy was 'lucky' through several waves of restructures and redundancies securing additional management roles alongside teaching. In 2018 the organisation went through another restructure and Wendy was put in the position of having to apply for the management job she had been doing since 2014. The role was slightly changed and re-named. This time Wendy did not get the job.

the person who got the role had no management experience, their highest qualification was a Level 3 in epilation [hair removal], whereas I had been managing since 2002, successfully. I'd got a Master's in Business and a

Master's in Education so when you compare, there is no comparison in terms of fitness for the role (Wendy career map conversation).

As discussed earlier, Wendy had continued to study and gain multiple qualifications, but in this instance, her proven skills and academic qualifications were given no value. Wendy strongly suspected that the decision had involved racial discrimination. Initially, she wanted to challenge the decision and her union encouraged her to take the case further but after a lot of thought she decided not to.

I do kick myself for not taking it further but you weigh it up...do I need a job?

People say that once you bring a grievance, they can't just get rid of you but I have been in FE a long time and I have seen people go who probably shouldn't have gone (Wendy career map conversation).

Wendy evidently felt vulnerable. It might be argued that the constant restructures, reorganisations and redundancy threats make it far easier for discriminatory and illegal practices to go unchallenged. A 2017 study of 'BME' teacher educators in universities raised issues that chime with Wendy's experience.

Vulnerability, insecurity and precariousness are generated through their positioning as a space invader...This vulnerability is also borne from the surveillance by students and managers to which these participants are subjected, as well as the microaggressions and micro-invalidations that reinforce their status as space invaders (Lander and Santoro 2017 pp. 1018).

While the quotation above refers to HE, Wendy's experience of the precarious nature of further education employment had stopped her from pursuing her legal rights. In effect, race is seen to over-ride acquired habitus as it introduces a new rule to the

game that means Wendy can never win, that she can only learn. Her experience of racism in the workplace may also have resulted in a more cautious, guarded career pathway. When considering looking for another job in the aftermath of the incident, she was reticent to take the risk involved with a new employer. Wendy gave a lot of weight to the localised nature of the professional respect and positive visibility that she had built up which may explain why she stuck with one organisation.

To go from somewhere where you are well-known and well established to somewhere where you are not known and not established is a very scary concept (Wendy Narrative Section 20).

For Wendy, Bourdieu's equation of '[(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice' (Bourdieu 1984, p.101), was disrupted by the intangible and unfair influence of racism. She came to further education with an existing habitus that matched that of her learners, developed into the institutional habitus, given her qualifications and embodied experience, her capital should have been high but the unstable field conditions caused by the constant restructuring allowed discrimination to take place. The impact on Wendy's practice is shown in the caution that she expressed above.

Wendy explained that it took her three years to recover from this painful incident and stop feeling like a 'space invader' (Lander and Santoro 2017 pp. 1018) to feel valued again: 'Now [2022] I have started to feel as valuable as a member of staff there as I did prior to 2018' (Wendy career map conversation). Again, Wendy's stoic personality appears to be the element that has allowed her to endure working conditions that negatively impacted on her professional value but then to recover and maintain her career in further education.

It seems that for my participants, the perpetual climate of potential redundancy was powerful in influencing their decisions to stay in a job or an organisation. Being made to feel vulnerable and powerless made them risk averse and less resistant to requests to take on extra work or take responsibility for things beyond their skills set. The examples of one restructure that took Mike into a management role and another that took Wendy into teacher training, underlines the mysterious and unpredictable nature of the process thus increasing the passivity that the participants felt; you might win or you might lose. Veteran-ness here disrupts the notion of a linear, upward career trajectory. Repeated re-restructures make for less predictable, halting and reversing career paths in further education.

When narrating the experiences of redundancy, restructuring and threats of redundancy, apart from Amy, none of the participants narrated the reasons that the institutions had made these decisions. When questioned in the interview stage of the data gathering, Amy recalled that when her group of adult educators were given the choice of moving to 16-18 year-old teaching or redundancy, her colleagues saw their principal as the source of the instability rather than the volatility of government further education funding policy:

We had a new principal at the time and the rumour was that she didn't want us doing adult provision, I don't know how true that was. It seemed to be just resentment at the fact that there was less work (Amy Work-life interview 2).

However, this is not an example of Foucault's diffuse power (1980) but rather an example of how the neoliberalised system seemingly masks responsibility. Amy's commentary gives an example of how the multiple layers of devolved governmental power creates confusion over responsibility. In the Veterans' recollections, the power of the 'restructure' was in most instances, faceless but the data also showed

how the multiple layers of power interact. The power of politicians and policy makers to impose their values through direct funding turns the gears within an institution to plan a restructure so that the institution can offer courses that garner the new funding but in doing so they infuse the process with their own values and beliefs about what is needed or not needed as could be seen in Sam's data. The next layer of managers selects and rearranges people adding their own values and bias as could be seen in Wendy's experience. The process of realigning staffing to funding streams objectifies the staff and uses the psychological violence of instability to keep people in an insecure state, cowed and compliant.

Bennett and Smith's contention that, 'The key quality of the FE subject – as – teacher is not to get noticed...' (2018 p.30) is supported by the Veterans' experience of institutional restructuring. We could perhaps modify it to, not to get noticed in any way that could be negatively construed. Adopting a passive position could then, in these circumstances, be interpreted as a survival technique. Appearing compliant and willing to be moved around is perhaps key in maintaining a long career in further education and can be seen as one ingredient in veteran-ness. Wendy mentioned seeing 'people go who probably shouldn't have gone' (Wendy career map conversation). She was all too aware of the risks of appearing awkward when in the next restructure you could lose your job.

Donna became a highly visible member of staff at her college but was moved from being judged positively to negatively through the operation of another element of the FAP apparatus (Smith and Duckworth 2022), an internal college performance regime. Donna's career reached a high point during the early 2000s as part of Skills for Life, seeing her researching, publishing and offering training across the country whilst retaining her college maths teaching job.

Then I left the college in 2007...um...because...I didn't...I no longer seemed to be in favour...um...so... [long pause] ...you know I had delivered teacher training ...I had delivered ITT for xxx university who paid xxx college for my time but...suddenly they didn't like...everything I did was wrong and I got some very bad grades for my observation so I left...so that was in 2007 (Donna Narrative Section 9).

As discussed in the Context chapter, the 'grades' refer to lesson observation grades where teachers were rated against Ofsted guidance as a quality control measure. The internal quality control of the institution had borrowed the legitimizing mantle of Ofsted to impose their own power of 'pedagogic authority' (Gallagher and Smith 2018 p.131) as an employer. The use of this type of coercion and control can again be seen as 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) in that it modifies behaviour and ensures compliance with the dominant discourse by framing the judgements as natural and encouraging staff to comply and accept these as justifiable faults to be addressed. However, for Donna the power of the negative judgement is a painful recollection. She mentions the date twice in this passage, she had forgotten other notable dates in her career, but this date has remained significant in her life. The impact that she still felt was evident in her voice, which lowered and slowed. She was visibly emotional.

Quality performance regimes of teacher observation, particularly unannounced observations, are intended to have the impact that Foucault (1977) referred to in his description of the 'panopticon' in prisons where people got so used to surveillance that they internalise the gaze and do the watchers' work for them. Under such a FAP regime, teachers should behave as if they are being watched all of the time because sometimes, they will be. However, in this sub-story Donna was

not being purposefully non-compliant. She chose not to narrate the detail of the judgement but it is perhaps notable that the previous year (2005/6) Ofsted itself had been restructured and the inspection framework had been through one of its regular changes (Ofsted 2007) thus keeping the process opaque. It may have been that altered perspectives judged what was desirable in her practice as now undesirable. Donna certainly communicated her sense of betrayal and of confusion over the incident fourteen years after the fact. There were frequent pauses in the narrative and her choice of words indicate her feeling of confusion. She had no idea why she was no longer 'in favour.' She felt that the change had been 'sudden' and contrasts the high value the organisation had placed on her to the criticism she received through 'bad grades.' One interpretation could be that the power of the 'panopticon' to control the behaviour of teachers is only effective if it is clear what they are intended to comply with.

Changes in funding, policy or quality frameworks can create conditions where a staff member no longer fits with the direction of the institution. Their cultural capital is reduced and value disappears, reducing their position in the field with sudden impact. Feeling unvalued within an institution creates uncomfortable working conditions, encouraging people to move on without the imposition of any specific redundancy or disciplinary measures. The hidden influence of these conditions perhaps link back to the repeated qualifications the women took to act as reassurance. Donna was able to move on in her career but a possible conclusion is that the ability to detect a continual refining of the rules of the game or at the very least, the ability to adapt to them is a salient feature of veteran-ness in further education.

To continue with the theme of power and control, teachers as well as being controlled or objectified are also often the objectifiers of their learners. Classroom management or the behaviour of the young people and adults who are being taught was an issue raised by four of the Veterans. Department of Education research concluded that learner behaviour was a major cause of teachers leaving the profession (DoE 2018 p.6) but for two of the group, Mike and Donna, the skill of managing the challenging behaviour of their learners was something they viewed in a positive light.

Wendy's experience shows that it is not just young people who can present a behaviour management challenge. She recalled, 'My first year on teacher ed. was horrendous' (Wendy Narrative Section 11). She explained that the previous teacher training team had been made redundant in a restructure and one of the departing tutors had agitated the trainees.

well let's just say that he had wound up the students so that the tutors who took over his role...there were three of us...they decided that we were the ones who were going to pay for his demise. One tutor, I don't think there was a week that she wasn't in tears (Wendy Narrative Section 11).

Wendy believed that the trainee teachers saw the new team of replacements as in some way responsible for the redundancies and were determined to give trouble in Wendy's sessions. An additional interpretation is that the Skills discourse positions the teacher training students as experts who have vocational capital because of their vocational backgrounds. The idea that they need to learn a whole new set of skills has been hidden from them by an over-emphasis on subject knowledge. Being forced to take up a subservient position in relation to Wendy is jarring for them and so they are resistant and find a reason, however illogical, to be resistant. Wendy explained the way that she conquered the situation and maintained her career.

I think the one thing is that, over a lifetime, is that I'm made of strong stuff'...

'There was myself and a guy called xxx and we were adamant that they weren't going to break us. Or they weren't going to see that they'd broken us (Wendy Narrative Section 11).

This memory points to the success of a character trait rather than a strategy but it does also highlight the importance of supportive collegiate relationships in enabling veteran-ness.

The issue of learner behaviour was far more prominent and career defining for Amy and critically it did not appear that she had the support of colleagues in her struggles. She recalled trying to teach maths to, 'kids who were throwing cans of Coke at you and pencils and hitting each other with keyboards' but unlike Wendy who had a colleague to support her, Amy remembered 'walking out and sitting in the car and crying' (Amy Narrative Section 7) alone. She remembered the incident in another job in 2017 which finally made her give up teaching maths,

there were...I don't know...about 20 odd kids and they were from different courses and they were vile and one of them called me a cxxt and I just melted down in class and walked out and I went into the staff room and said I am refusing to go back in there (Amy Narrative Section 14).

Despite Amy's distress, her manager offered little sympathy: 'She said to me that it was the changing nature of the students' (*ibid.*) and sent her back into the classroom. The manager belittled Amy's struggle with controlling the outrageous behaviour of the learners. Instead of seeing the issue in a wider context, it is turned back on Amy in a way that isolates her and seems to apportion personal fault. Amy was teaching a subject notorious for negative behaviour from learners but the lack of support seems

to have been the critical element in forcing her to make a decision about the direction of her career.

Amy's experience correlates with Day and Sammons' (2006) ideas of career stages somewhat. She certainly felt 'tired and trapped' due to the learner behaviour she encountered but it was in the middle rather than late part of her career as they had predicted (p.114). Amy made the decision to move away from direct teaching.

I think it's important to know when it's your time to leave...I'd lost that passion in the classroom, I didn't want to be one of these that just went in and did the job...I didn't feel like I could keep giving...I just ran out of energy I think, for the youngsters um I didn't think it was fair on them, I think they need someone who can give them the energy and the support and lift them up...and I felt I had lost that (Amy Work-life Interview 1 Q4).

Happily, Amy's studies provided her with an alternative pathway for maintaining her career. She had built her qualifications around valuable digital skills which enabled her to redirect her career into managing a team of digital coaches. Although she retained her belief in further education, she decided that her teaching days were over. Changing to a professional support role in further education allowed her to make use of her previous experience but to move away from the aspects that she found problematic. For Amy, veteran-ness involved having an alternative to the classroom but also in career progression.

This contrasts with the trajectories of the other participants. Day and Sammons (2006 p.97) claim that promotion will have a sustaining influence on 'motivation and self-efficacy' in the later stages of a teaching career. This could be seen most clearly in Sam's career. Although he had faced many challenges due his increasing

responsibilities, he was able to move away from jobs he didn't enjoy through promotion (Sam timeline).

M's experience matched closely with Day and Sammons' category of 'tired and trapped' during late career (2006 p.114). He did not mention any workplace promotions but repeatedly railed against 'the managers' (Narrative sections 6, 16) and 'the bosses' (Q3 Work-life Interview) and just 'they' (Narrative sections 10, 14) showing his frustration with his feeling of a lack of agency.

Alternatively, Mike and Donna both gave up management positions to return to lower status jobs where they felt that their work had more value. Day and Sammons (2006) explain that the benefit of promotion derives from the sense of recognition of personal value. From the data, it seems the recognition of value is important to obtaining veteran-ness but that does not necessarily attach to promotion through a hierarchy.

## 6.6 Themes 5: Retirement

In 2.13 changes in legislation and discourse around retirement were discussed. The Teachers working longer group (2018 p.14) reported 'considerable evidence gaps' in available data because 'relatively few teachers currently work into their sixties'. Three of the participants in this study were in their 60s so the data can offer some elucidation around why they chose to continue working or alternatively if their veteran-ness is the result of a lack of options around retirement. The plans of the three participants in their 50s for retirement will also be examined.

The data showed that none of the participants were over their current state pension age. However, they will all be working longer than they would have originally expected. For the women, who started their working lives with the expectation of retiring at 60 there will have been a significant increase in their expected years of

work of between 6 and 8 years. Five of the six participants started work at or before the age of 16 so they will be extending their working lives beyond 50 years.

Three of the six participants (Mike, Donna and Sam) narrated details around their pension positions that showed they understood their options for retirement, even if the options were limited or unfavourable. Two (Amy and M) showed at least some unsureness about their position.

Alongside their state pensions, which they have contributed to via national insurance, all of the participants were part of the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS). Unlike the schools' sector, the pension schemes used across the various parts of the further education sector vary. Private training providers, charities, and work-based providers are not part of the TPS. Community learning is often linked to local authority schemes. Two of the participants (Amy and Donna) had limited their TPS contributions by moving to parts of the sector outside the scheme. For some of the participants, Amy, Donna and Mike, low pensions pay-out predictions were set to limit their future retirement options. Sam and M had made some plans but Wendy did not mention the subject.

M, at 63, shows an element of compulsion in his veteran-ness.

I would say it's depressing more than anything else. I want to retire early.

Three or four of us are around about that age, if we can find any way to go a year early, we will go a year early.

He is clear that once his financial position allows it, he will finish his career.

Mike, at 64, showed a more complex picture. He had a low pension prediction due to being 40 when he started his teaching career which has not given him sufficient time to amass contributions. However, he was not concerned about the future or about the relatively low pay out predication for his pension saying, 'I don't really

think about money' (Mike Work-life interview). At the time of the interview, he wanted to go on working because he enjoyed his work. He had already stepped back from management into a teaching role but he did have a plan for when or if he felt teaching had got too much for him to change to a part-time non-teaching role: 'I think what they are missing here is the internal quality assurance stuff which I could do two days a week' (Mike Work-life interview). At 64 years old, he had no particular plan for the age he wanted to work until but contrary to his claim to not think about money, he quoted an exact figure for his TPS annuity payment and had calculated that he would need to work until he could claim his state pension. At the time of interview, Mike was still enjoying his work but his options to give up working in further education were limited by finances.

Amy and Donna, also had limited pensions but the reasons were more complicated. They both had a gradual start to their careers where they were volunteers, then employed on casual contracts for a few hours a week. Donna said:

when I started it was hourly then four days a week, people think you are going to get this great pension out of it but unless you start when you are 20 and go right through it's rubbish (Donna Work-life Interview).

For Amy and Donna, their movement around the sector between GFE, private training organisations and local authorities had also disrupted their pensions' contributions. Donna, who was 61 at the time of interview and working for a private training provider, had decided to take her TPS pension as she was no longer paying into it. She had a clear picture of what her financial position was and had made calculated decisions by re-investing her lump sum pay out.

How much Donna's financial position influenced her continuing to work and her Veteran status is ambiguous. When discussing her pension she said, 'That is the

other reason why I'm still working, I couldn't afford not to.' However, when asked directly, 'So you are still working in FE because you can't afford to retire?' She was reluctant to confirm that conclusion: 'If I'm honest a lot of the time I enjoy it' (Donna Work-life Interview Q9). There does appear to be an element of compulsion in her decision to stay but she is evidently still gaining gratification beyond money from her work.

Amy's outlook for retirement was by far the most negative. She said that she could see, looking back, that she had made some poor decisions regarding her pension but she had also got caught by errors made by employers and pensions providers. She had a shock when, 'I went on line to check my [TPS] account and it was empty' (Amy Work-life interview 2). After 18 months of phone calls and being passed between two college employers and the TPS no one would take responsibility for the absence of contributions.

I got the money back eventually ...and this is where it becomes my fault and not theirs...I got the money back and went on holiday! (Amy Work-life interview 2).

Returning the cash appears to be a relinquishment of power on the part of the pensions system. It is 'rational' within a neoliberal construct to relinquish responsibility to the individual as a way of controlling conduct through appearing to give freedom. Peeters (2019) explains how neoliberal social policies require the 'manufacturing' of responsibility. 'Responsibilisation' is the process of passing responsibilities from the state to individuals and communities in order to limit the financial risks and requirements placed on the state (Pyysiäinen *et al* 2017). Amy is expected to assume responsibility for her pension. As a Veteran in further education, she might reasonably have expected pension issues to be managed for

her. She stated that most of her information about pensions came from friends and she didn't know if what they said was correct. Her interview answers also showed how the change in the discourse around pensions has left her out of step with the fallacy of freedom.

People that were paying into private pensions were (searching for words) middle class rich people, you never thought about early retirement because retirement was not supposed to be at 68 it was supposed to be at 60 for women and you know no one has ever talked to me about it. I'm not stupid but I don't know what to do. I know I have made some bad decisions (Amy Work-life interview 2).

It seems that Amy expected that the state pension would be sufficient and that she blamed herself for her lack of understanding of the changed circumstances.

The lack of cohesion in the further education sector's pension arrangements have impacted badly on Amy adding an additional layer of precarity to her career. She explained that moving around the different types of further education providers had left her with several negligible pension pots in schemes such as local government:

Then when I came back into GFE I am employed by a subsidiary company so it's not the TPS but I've only been paying into it for 3 years so my prediction at the end is only £1,000 a year (Amy Work-life interview 2).

Her current employer has avoided putting her into the TPS by employing her under a subsidiary company although she works within a further education college. This can be seen as a symptom of the neoliberalisation of further education since incorporation. The ethical role of the institution to look after their employees has been compromised by the drive to be economically efficient. Her role of coaching

teachers with their digital skills has been classified as non-academic so when she changed role from teaching, she lost her eligibility to be in the TPS. Classifying roles as 'support' allows employers to avoid the relatively high contribution for the TPS and enter the employee into pensions' schemes that require a smaller percentage of the salary as the employer contribution. The data shows that Veteran teachers cannot afford to retreat from classroom teaching in their final years: they must keep teaching or gain promotion if they are not to be penalised. Again, veteran-ness further education can mean making difficult choices.

Amy's negative pension position is representative of a wider problem for women. The 'Close the Gap' (2023) organisation detail the societal discriminatory factors that are at the root of the lower amount of pension assets which produces poverty for women in retirement. Many of the factors align with Amy's experience including a working life interrupted by childcare, returning to education and being a single mum. Scottish Widows' research based on their own statistics, ONS and YouGov data, shows that the gap between male and female pension savings in the UK are worsening year on year. They state that, 'The average man aged 65 to 74 today has over £250,000 of pension assets, compared to less than £150,000 for the average woman' (Scottish Widows 2022 p.3). Seen in this wider context, Amy's willingness to take 'blame' for her negative position seems entirely unwarranted.

In terms of Amy's Veteran status, it seems her financial position will limit her freedom to choose to leave work. However, at 54 years old, Amy still has 14 years to work until her state pension age, so she has time to improve her position. She said that taking part in the study had forced her to think about her position and that she would now take action.

Characteristically, Sam had a well-developed plan for the future. He was 52 at the time of interview and the youngest of the participants. He was planning to retire from his current role at 61 or 62, then do selective part-time things.

I don't think I will fully retire, I will partially retire. I can't sustain this level, as I say. I'm OK with my job, you know I'm not about to fall over but the sustained pressure...you know there are times of the year when I feel like I could fall over and I can't see myself doing that into my 60s. One of the problems with the teacher's pension is, you know I get a reasonable forecast now, it is not the best, it's not the worst while I'm doing a proper role but if I reduce down then my pay goes down and my contributions go down and elongates the process so I'm stuck in a little bit of limbo at the moment (Sam Work-life interview).

The contrast with Amy is notable, both in his level of engagement with the process and the options he has open to him. His length of service and higher salary as a manager will allow him to freeze his contributions and step away from his high-pressure role. Sam had experienced doing a teaching job that was classified as an 'instructor' at the start of his career that could have impacted on his eventual pension. However, for him, the period had been short and due to his longitudinally higher pay, he avoided any shortfall.

It is notable that his higher management role although not directly in contact with learners was not re-classified as non-academic. There appears to be a hierarchical unfairness in who is allowed the title of 'teacher' and access to the scheme. The TPS itself has rules about eligibility but does not 'expressly define' (TPS 2022 p.2) what teaching work is. They stipulate that membership should be for those 'responsible for the development, progress and attainment of a student(s)' but that

could include both of Sam's roles. Excluding one and including the other is a decision for 'each employer' (TPS 2022 p.3). The power to make these decisions lies with the employer including governing bodies to determine whether to benefit those closest to them or those at the bottom of the ladder who need it most.

Sam's more favourable financial position could be interpreted as being 'deserved' because he has risen up the hierarchical system on 'merit'. However, as discussed in the Literature Review, theorists such as Littler (2018) and Sandel (2021) would see the dichotomy between Sam and Amy's prospects as evidence of the failure of an imagined meritocratic system. Using their critical lens, educational institutions that elect to pay proportionally higher rewards to managers as they rise up through the constructed pyramid of hierarchy are recreating the inequalities of the neoliberalised society. Littler (2018) and Sandel (2021) would see that the rewards are not based on 'merit' but on winning a loaded game, in the case of pensions the rewards carry on after the game has finished.

The impact of the less favourable working conditions that the female participants experienced and M's confusion showed the discourse of individual responsibility and choice to be deceptive. The impact of longstanding lower pay in comparison to schoolteachers, more disrupted career patterns, employers who are not part of the TPS and employers' avoidance tactics limited pension savings even for those, like Sam, who are relatively comfortable. For some of the Veterans, the data shows a pattern of discriminatory interactions that will have a lasting effect on their well-being.

## 6.7 Themes that were absent or lacked sufficient evidence

In this section I will explore themes that were present in the literature but either entirely absent or was only present in the data of a single individual.

### 6.7.1 Ageism

The Context chapter suggested that there may be evidence of ageism within the careers of these older workers, either as direct discrimination, external stereotyping or self-imposed stereotyping (Swift and Steeden 2020). There was no evidence found to support these suggestions.

### 6.7.2 Mental health

The possibility of work-related mental health difficulties was raised in the early part of the study as a reason why people choose to retire early (ONS 2022). High rates of work-related stress, depression and anxiety are recognised as reasons that teachers leave the profession (Ofsted 2019). Such difficulties were not shown in the data. However, I would not use this absence to conclude that their veteran-ness is in any way related to a resilience to stress or particularly robust mental health. Although none of the participants mentioned their mental health explicitly, on such a short acquaintance, it seems unlikely that they would. Implicitly, mental health as in their emotional state, was raised at several points, for example when Amy decided to leave front-line teaching, when Wendy decided not to pursue her discrimination case or M's unhappiness with his day-to-day work. Whether any of these incidents of distress or low mood escalated into a significant mental health issue is not discernible from the data.

### 6.7.3 Workload

Issues of workload had been shown in the Context chapter as a reason why many teachers leave teaching (DfE 2018 p.2). This issue was mentioned by Wendy and obliquely by Sam but not with a view to leaving the profession. The absence of this topic from the narration does not mean that the participants did not experience unmanageable workloads at times but that this is not something that, in retrospect, they considered important enough to talk about. The cognitive bias to recall past times nostalgically (Mitchell and Thompson 1994) could be cited as a reason for omission but other difficult aspects of their experiences were chosen to be narrated. On balance, I would conclude that despite the challenges they faced, such as juggling multiple zero-hours contracts, excessive workload was not a dominant feature of their careers.

### 6.7.4 Regulatory gaze

The impact of quality assurance systems and audit as a 'technology of compliance' (Gallagher and Smith 2016, p.1) that was discussed in the Context chapter, was not as prominent as expected in the narratives. As discussed in 5.5, Donna had been negatively impacted by organisational quality assurance procedures. It was surprising however, that Ofsted and experiences of inspection were only mentioned by M and Wendy, and only then, in response to directed questions at the interview stage. As with the absence of narration on workload, the absence of this theme from the narratives does not mean that it has had no impact, just that they did not choose it as a subject to speak about.

The structuring of the retrospective style of personal narrative used for this study entailed the participants situating themselves at the centre and creating their

subjective status through the story they told. This style may have lead them to focus on events and threads where they perceived themselves as being the agentive force driving the narrative. There were, however, many examples within each narrative where they chose to speak about events where they felt little agency, such as restructures and redundancy processes. This leads me to draw the conclusion that although the Veterans had experience of Ofsted inspections, they did not prioritise them as topics to narrate.

## Chapter 7 Conclusions

The research questions for this study revolved around how and why the Veterans had maintained their careers for 20 years or more. In this section, I present what can be concluded from the data as the foundational pillars that underpin veteran-ness in further education.

### 7.1 Pillar 1: A sustainable emotional attachment

The data showed that for this group of six people, the motivation to continue in further education to reach 20 years or more was multi-layered; starting in their own backgrounds and progressing into a range of field-related professional identities that found purpose and acceptance in their environment. The data draws me to the conclusion that having an emotional attachment or moral involvement with learners and learner groups sustains motivation. However, the attachment may also be a threat to veteran-ness if the connection is not sustainable.

Throughout Chapter 5, I have shown that the Veterans were sustained by the construction and preservation of their teacher 'self' and their sense of purpose. Their evolved dispositions can be linked to both pre-conscious habitus (Deer 2008) and the institutional habitus of their work. Each of the Veterans' had their own beliefs and attitudes around their work which sustained them in their careers. The data has shown that despite their, at times fragile status, the group are characterised by their learner centred values even if for some, their values have become indistinct and are not articulated under the pressure of everyday work.

I had not originally intended to collect data about the participants' lives prior to teaching beyond demographic information and dates. Even so, all six Veterans understood how central these factors were to their own motivation and included

detail about what brought them to teaching and about their own backgrounds.

These prefaces and extra detail around their work-life narratives proved invaluable in explaining their deep connections to further education that reinforced their longevity.

All six Veterans classified themselves as having working class backgrounds but as noted throughout, this meant quite different things to them. This does not mean that there was any homogeneity to their experience of class. However, for the participants, their own backgrounds were important to the way they felt about their work.

Five out of the six participants had been further education learners themselves and five had left school initially at 15 or 16. They understood what it felt like to be 'othered' (hooks 1992) by an unfair education system and the need to give people an equal chance to develop. Amy and Mike both spoke movingly about how their own difficult experiences created their motivation. These participants particularly shared memories that showed that they had experienced feeling 'othered' by society and so identified strongly with their learners. Their working class origins gave them the insight to see beyond the societal myths that cast further education learners as failures, to see individuals like them.

Initially, changing social status or social mobility was a common motivator at the start of their careers. In Theme 1 'Beginnings' in Chapter 5, I suggested that for five out of the six Veterans, the early career difficulties they experienced in securing a substantive, permanent contract with the title 'teacher/lecturer' were perhaps exploitative but can also be interpreted as motivational for them in that they felt they had broken a barrier to attain an elite status. In Chapter 5, I discussed

commonalities in the experiences of the women in their struggles to attain that status. It was noted that the women were trying to change their careers and their social status in the wake of becoming mothers. Maternity and changed priorities rather than a career break seemed to be the key factor here. The financial risks that they took may have been with a view of eventual higher wages to provide for their children. However, for Amy and Wendy I felt that their own higher education studies (both in social science) had led to a transformative awakening to the lifelong impact of the social conditions that their own children would inherit, making them want to change their status to be better role models for their children.

Parenthood may also have been a motivator for the men to seek a change in social status but they did not speak about it. Sam spoke about his original motivation being sparked by his wish to emulate the inspirational further education teaching he had experienced as an apprentice. M and Mike were different in that their original motivation was to escape their industrial work situations into an occupation that would be less physically damaging.

However, once they entered further education, the conclusion drawn from the data is that, for all of the Veterans, their motivation to stay was enabled by the matching of personal habitus to the institutional habitus of further education. The data suggested that, for this small group of participants, seeing themselves as having a working class identity was a positive influence on longevity. In 3.3.3 I drew on Bourdieu's writing on education to argue that further education, or specifically the vocational elements, are positioned within UK society as a working class edifice aimed at reproducing the stratified and oppressive status quo. With regard to the Veterans' motivation to remain, further education provides a familiar and comfortable working class institutional environment where their personal

disposition was unnoticeable to them and caused no friction, as the 'fish in water' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992 p.127).

This conclusion is reinforced by Donna's narrative about her discomfort working in the school system where she experienced a clash in habitus or the need to adopt a habitus clivé (Bourdieu 2000). This example showed that the comfort of habitus was not just about the interaction with and care for the learners. Donna had found a job where she was working with culturally similar groups of learners in a school as she had in further education but she experienced what Reay described as a 'powerful sense of loss that comes through unwanted social and psychological distance' (Reay 2013a p.674). Donna clashed with the authoritarian behaviour regimes in school which suggests she was uncomfortable with the subordinate position learners are expected to adopt in school compared to the institutional expectations of further education.

Donna's experience of the challenges of adopting a 'cleft habitus' (Reay 2010) also highlights the importance of comfortable, supportive collegiate relationships in sustaining motivation. Donna cited the difference in backgrounds and life experiences of the schoolteachers and further education teachers she had worked with and her comfort in returning to further education and a 'motley crew' of colleagues. Collegiality was also important to Wendy who recalled how she had conquered the hostility she encountered when she moved into teacher training with the support of a colleague. Sam spoke about how much he had missed just sitting with colleagues over the pandemic. M. spoke about planning his escape into early retirement with likeminded colleagues. Conversely, Amy made the decision to step back from teaching when the lack of support from a colleague with classroom

management isolated her. Having allies that share values was shown to be important in enabling veteran-ness.

The literature on professional identity proved useful but rather rigid in categorizing something so ephemeral as personal positioning and values. Chapter 3 built a picture of a range of value-based positions from neoliberal instrumentalist doxa to the gradations of individualised hybrids up to critical pedagogy. Overall, the data showed the participants' axiological disposition lay somewhere along that continuum in their ethical position. All of the participants rejected simple instrumentalism and 'othering' of further education learners in favour of an individually focused ethic of 'moral involvement' (Bathmaker and Avis 2013) with their learners. The evidence did somewhat support Bathmaker and Avis' view that 'moral involvement' represents a discourse of control where employers are able to manipulate and exploit the commitment of practitioners (p.734/5). The Veterans had to make difficult decisions when employer demands did not match their own values. Donna and Amy had resigned from jobs when they experienced a clash of values. For other Veterans, 'moral involvement' was a compromise position adopted to comply (or at least to give the appearance of complying) with the pressures of organisational pictures of professionalism.

This 'realism' was a commonality with all of the Veterans to a greater or lesser extent that emerged from Chapter 5. I noted evidence where the participants showed elements of critical pedagogy but I did not find enough in the data to show that any of the Veterans, even Donna, reached the point of educating for societal change required for critical pedagogy as defined by Giroux (2020). However, I would still argue that within their compromise/compromised positions of compliance, all the Veterans had used the limited agency they possessed as a

‘moral and political’ (Giroux 2020 p.1) tool to give hope to the individuals and groups of learners that they served.

The data suggested that none of the participants saw their practice as ‘neutral or objective’ (Giroux 2020 p.4), they were fully aware of their power to change the lives of their learners but also of the constraints and limits of their roles within an unfair society.

Giroux wrote,

Foundational to critical pedagogy is the recognition that the way we educate our youth is related to the future we hope for and that such a future should offer students a life that leads to the deepening of freedom and social justice (2020 p.183)

The future, that the Veterans were educating their learners towards, was one where they must learn to compromise as best they can with a flawed world. None of them, however, took the leap into educating learners for a world where neoliberalism is not ascendant. Their ‘hope’ was for the individuals or communities that they were emotionally and morally attached to would escape the damage being visited on them by a society and schooling that objectified them as disposable. The Veterans did not extend their ‘hope’ to changing society away from weighing people according to their usefulness in moneymaking. They did however, show a value set that, although constrained and not allowed to flourish within the working conditions of further education, remained unextinguished.

The emotional connection to a specific community was shown to be an important element in the individualised professional identities of the Veterans and the

continuity of their commitment. However, when that connection was broken the data showed that motivation to continue teaching deteriorated.

The well-being of the specific community and individuals in that community, act as the focus for the enactment of their axiology in the practice of the Veterans. These communities were sometimes a specific institution, for example Wendy and Sam felt a connection to the college where they worked. However, for the majority of the Veterans their emotional connection was based on learner characteristics rather than place or subject areas. Wendy felt community with Access to Higher Education learners, through her own educational journey. For M, there was a fraternalism that connected him to the prisoners. For Donna and Mike it was underserved young people and for Amy, underserved adults. When separated from these specific groups, their motivation suffered. Mike had become frustrated and de-motivated by his management role and moved back to teaching to regain his focus. Donna renewed her motivation through finding a job where she could re-align with her focus community working with young, disadvantaged learners feeling comfortable and useful. Contrastingly, when Amy was unable to find a job with underserved adults she lost motivation and moved away from front line teaching.

The evidence presented here, from the six Veterans, showed that despite the dominance of the Skills discourse in government further education policy, the Veteran participants' longevity was fuelled by matters that transcended policy rhetoric and instead relied on deeply engrained values. The rhetoric masks what is rewarding about teaching in further education, for these participants and what motivates them to keep working. The Skills discourse objectifies learners into economic units to be processed by further education ready for deployment into industry and their teachers into processors. The testimonies of the Veterans

uncovered the hollowness of that discourse. I have argued in this study that the Skills discourse devalues the complexity of teaching in further education by portraying the role as a skills instructor. The recollections of the Veterans showed multiple examples of the challenging and rewarding nature of the role and the reflective way in which they engage in their pedagogical decisions and pedagogical relationship building with their students. The picture that emerged was remote from that of a skills instructor. I would conclude that these six people, actively rejected that characterisation by fashioning nuanced and individual teacher identities for themselves.

The literature had suggested that late-career workers would be more intrinsically motivated, with extrinsic motivators such as money and promotion having been extinguished by experience and the narrowing of remaining opportunities (ONS 2022). This was shown in the data however, motivators such as promotions were evident. Almost all of the participants had gained promotions and advanced their careers at some point (M was the exception). Sam, Mike and Wendy had taken steps up in the hierarchy of general further education. Amy and Donna had taken opportunities for management roles in community education. However, Donna, Mike and Amy had left these more advanced positions because they did not feel motivated by the work. Sam and Wendy found that advancement brought with it a whole new set of issues including workload and the emotional weight of responsibility. The career patterns of the Veterans suggested that the emotional motivation, to make a difference to learners, had played the dominant role for the whole of their careers not just the later part. The emotions attached to their work drove their motivation and prompted changes when that motivation was not

satisfied. Their deeper values survived the neoliberalisation of the Skills discourse to keep their connection to learners as people.

Mike perhaps summed up the Veterans' motivation, 'it gets in your blood doesn't it? You're either that way or not' (Mike Narrative Section 2). Mike sees the emotional attachment in terms of nature but my interpretation of the data is that the genealogy of his commitment and of the other Veterans goes back firstly to their personal histories and the reasons they chose further education in the first place. The longevity of commitment relied on finding a focus for their work where their emotional attachment could be exercised.

## 7.2 Pillar 2: A realist disposition

Above I have located the values positions of the Veterans as a position of compromise and that adopting such a position is an element of their veteran-ness. Throughout this study I have argued that further education displays weak and often opaque field conditions. Constant changes in policy, funding and audit rules create an environment where it is difficult to predict the future, plan a career strategy or position yourself towards a safe and sustainable career. I would conclude that veteran-ness requires the adoption of a 'habitus of necessity' or a learned 'realist disposition' to prevent the dissonance of *habitus clivé* 'between expectations and outcomes' (Bourdieu 2000 p.233).

For some of the Veterans, (perhaps excluding Sam and Wendy) the realist disposition of the represents a withdrawal into the immediate relationality with students and the shutting out of wider perspectives as an act of self-preservation. This originates in the tension between their values position and the wider institutional habitus: which requires a limiting of input from the wider field. This may

again be a self-defensive limiting of engagement that enables veteran-ness. The Veterans accepted the unpredictability and found their own individual state of equilibrium through their career choices and everyday focus on learners.

Limiting input from the wider field was evidenced in the absence of narration around further education policy. This project was about memory, the memories of the participants and of further education. I had planned to delve into the Veterans' memories to address the 'collective amnesia' (Norris and Adam 2017 p.9) that has beset further education around the churn of policy initiatives. It was surprising when issues of policy and frustration were found to be largely absent from the narrative data. The picture of further education that emerged from the policies explored in Chapter 2 focused largely on the Skills discourse of work and usefulness to industry, did not reflect the experience of the participants. Preparing learners for work also featured very little in the Veterans' narratives, with far more words being expended on individual learners that they recalled. The life issues of the learners figured far more prominently than policy or industry in the narratives. For example, Mike's narration was almost entirely about specific learners and incidents around them. M's narrative, though peppered with his frustrations around management were still focused on the everyday interaction with learners. Wendy and Amy narrated some negative experiences with learners but the focus was still on the classroom rather than policy.

The absence of extended narration on policy could indicate a lack of awareness. However, when asked direct questions about policy, the majority of the participants showed that they understood it on a local and often national scale, they had opinions and spoke about their own connected experiences. They had managed to embody and implement policy without it becoming central to their thinking or

remembrances. Only M seemed largely unaware of specifics, perhaps due to his enclosed working environment. The Skills for Life policy (2001-2010) was an exception for the women of the group, in that it was mentioned without prompting, during narration and recalled in positive terms. The data showed that the participants were not unaware of the impact of policy on their careers but preferred to speak about the areas where they felt they had more agency or personal power. This perhaps suggests a slight modification of Bourdieu's realist disposition (2000) that Bourdieu described as being 'close to fatalism' (2000 p.233). This pragmatic realism can give a more conscious reflexive explanation of their narrowed horizons. The Veterans' long experience has brought a decisive consciousness in which focusing on the visible impact of their work allows them to find an equilibrium where it is possible to ignore the external pressures of the sector.

There was a sense that career strategizing was not effective in the unpredictable conditions. The Veterans shared their experiences of restructures, redeployment, redundancy, racism, audit, challenging behaviour and funding cuts. The data described an employment environment where accountability, the responsabilisation of managerialism, meritocracy and the neoliberalisation that saturate the environment led them to a denuded sense of agency and lead them to internalise blame rather than attribute it to external forces. The participants felt under almost constant threat and felt they had little agency to change things. It can be concluded that the 'symbolic violence' of precarity became part of the accepted 'field conditions' expected of further education (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Both male and female participants had experienced precarity which influenced the directions of their careers. The suggestions in the literature review that precarity

will form and alter habitus to the point of becoming 'symbolic domination' (Masquelier 2018 p.21) was confirmed.

From the outset of the Veterans' careers, the lack of clarity around how to become a further education teacher can be said to begin the cycle of precarity in service of the neoliberal agenda. The lack of a 'collective structure' around entry allows the freedom of 'pure market logic' (Bourdieu 1998 p.1) to create a workforce that flexes to respond to the market. Having few rules around entry that are mandatory allows barriers to be erected or taken away according to the localised and prevalent will of employers.

Five of the six Veterans spoke about the difficulties they faced early in their careers in obtaining a secure contract that recognised their teaching role. The use of volunteers in the place of paid (rather than supernumerary) staff, casualised contracts, very fractional contracts (a few hours a week) and the use of 'instructor' designations were all shown to be features of their early careers. It can then be argued that their early career experiences, when they had little professional capital, conditioned them from the start, to see their status attached to unpredictable and opaque conditions that were beyond their control.

It was a surprising and disappointing finding that for five of the six Veterans precarity continued throughout their careers, even after they had built their professional capital through qualifications and experience. Later in their careers, the almost constant threat of redundancy or mandatory redeployment continued to act as symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) and reinforced their conditioned responses. The absence of anger, overt resistance or positioning

themselves as victims of external policy changes in their narratives, is consistent with symbolic violence in which those subjected to it, blame themselves.

The participants interpreted being made redundant or avoiding redundancy as largely luck (Sam Work life interview, Wendy career map conversation). The operation of institutional power to condemn or save, removed their personal agency and the idea of 'luck' suggested that they felt a randomness in the process. They had been so conditioned by precarity that they believed themselves to be blameworthy and expendable and 'lucky' is they were able to keep their jobs.

Restructuring of organisations to meet new funding rationales and policy drivers was shown to be a repeated experience that increased the sense of jeopardy and influenced career decisions (five of the six participants spoke about their experiences of restructures and/or redundancy threats). M. had made the decision to move into prison teaching in response to redundancy threats in his community-based teaching. However, the greater value placed on certain traditionally male identified skills sets within the further education discourse was shown. Sam and Mike (electrical and carpentry) not only avoided redundancy but were propelled upwards into more senior positions by restructuring. For these men their veteran-ness represents their personal success but also the privilege accorded by the further education workplace to certain identities according to an implicit set of rules around sex, race and disciplinary area.

Moving into management roles away from 'frontline' teaching could be seen as an agentive strategy in the face of the precarious conditions. However, the reported evidence from Sam of his management colleagues' redundancy and Wendy's constantly changing and merging management roles would suggest that levels of

precarity continued into the layers of management. Amy, Donna and Mike also gave up management roles in favour of teaching roles at points in their careers, suggesting that they did not see management as exempt from precarity.

The adoption of a realist disposition or habitus of necessity meant that the participants had become inured to the working conditions of the sector. The exploitative employment practices had become normalised as shown by the shared experiences of the sector across various types of provision including colleges, independent training providers and community settings. The neoliberalised Skills discourse positions business as the guiding power that drives changes of funding and policy direction in further education which gives a veneer of (apolitical) practicality whilst ensuring the continuation of an unequal societal structure. It allows government to portray 'policy churn' as the changing priorities of industry rather than lack of cohesive forward thinking. It also masks institutional mismanagement of change which was evidenced in the experiences of Wendy who had been through more restructures within a single institution than other Veterans in similar institutions in the same timeframe suggesting that at least some of the precarity produced was preventable. A constant underlying threat of precarity was accepted and expected as part of the 'rules of the game' for the field (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) but the narratives show that some of the Veterans had to make difficult decisions to survive in further education.

There were gendered elements shown in the data that warrant the conclusion that the women encountered different 'rules of the game' to the men. From this small sample, this does not mean that the 60.2% of further education teachers who identify as female (Education Statistics Service 2023) all suffer discrimination. However, the women had clearly experienced less favourable working conditions in

comparison to the men and faced fewer favourable retirement options. The size of the sample makes it impossible to draw a wider conclusion, but for these women, the characterisation of further education as skills based, combined with underlying patriarchally conditioned attitudes, allowed the men's 'skills' to be seen as more valuable by employers. For the participants, this resulted in the men experiencing lower levels of precarity in their employment conditions and better access to training. The data collected for my thesis did not include information about salaries but the higher salaries of the men can be inferred from the more favourable pensions and retirement plans that they did speak about.

Within this small sample, precarity was more acute for the females than the males. The females all had to work unpaid to get the experience they needed to apply for paid jobs and pay for their own training. The men were all paid from the start and had their training funded by employers. As their careers went on, the women had to teach multiple subjects and continue to bolster their professional status by taking multiple qualifications in their struggle to accrue symbolic capital (Bourdieu 2010). However, these strategies were largely unsuccessful as the women also experienced more disrupted career trajectories because their work was less valued by employers. Even Wendy, who had stayed with one employer, had moved through multiple roles, sometimes not through her own choice; being pressured to take on unmanageable workloads. There may be elements of sexism, and in Wendy's case, racism, involved in the less favourable treatment of the women but I would also argue that there was a relationship between the internal discourses of further education and inequitable practices. The humanities subjects that the women were teaching did not fit with the 'neoliberal Skills discourse that sees further education almost exclusively in terms of ' the production of human capital

for employers' (Duckworth and Smith 2018 p.3). The women (and to some extent M) had to adapt and pick up roles that were not necessarily within their skills set. Two of the women were teaching both English and maths, which would be quite unusual in any other setting, to give themselves greater flexibility.

In the Context chapter the concept of 'flexible female' workers who are 'willing to accept poorer conditions and rates of pay' (Pickard 2016 p.42) was discussed. This proved to be true, though over a more protracted time span than was postulated by Pickard. The need for flexibility, to change and respond to the unpredictable working environment had spread over the entirety of their careers so far. From this picture it can be asserted that the neoliberal Skills discourse that pervades further education has a patriarchal undercurrent and disproportionately impacts on female employees. For the women participants in this study, their veteran-ness is the product of high levels of determination.

This evidence has potential implications for future policy and practice. Greater recognition is needed of the precarity of employment conditions created by policy churn in further education. For institutions, greater consideration should be given to the potential creation of gender-based precarity when implementing changes to staffing to align with new policies.

### 7.3 Pillar 3: A distinct further education pedagogy

The data revealed some element of distinction about the further education teaching environment. My interpretation is that the Veterans' deep understanding of what is unique about the sector is an element of veteran-ness which is learnt through both experience and study.

It was notable that the Veterans' focus communities sometimes crossed further education provision types. For instance, Donna found the same motivation teaching disadvantaged young people in college or in an ITP but notably not in a school. Similarly, Amy's focus on disadvantaged adults was the same whether working in a college or the community. This does give some evidence to suggest that there is a more 'transcendent' (Smith 2017 p.858) element to further education as a definable, if weak, field that is not visible in policy or the rhetoric of Skills. The primary and secondary data collected supports the designation of further education teachers as a distinct class fraction in Bourdieusian terms. In Chapters 2 and 3 it was shown that further education teachers are marginalised from their school-based counterparts by the absence of clearly defined professional status markers and the erosion of working conditions and pay. I have also argued that the characterisation of further education as working-class training for industry also degrades the professional status of this group.

Chapter 5 presented data that showed that although there were many differences shown in the experiences of the group, there was evidence that being a further education teacher constitutes a distinct social space. The reliance on cultural capital as a source of status was ostensibly similar to Bourdieu's original observations of the difference between primary, secondary and higher education as different fractions (1984 p.109). However, the relative value of cultural capital within further education showed specific idiosyncratic features that are profoundly driven by the neoliberalised characterisation of the Skills discourse. For example, in other educational settings, the women's repeated qualifications would have enhanced their capital and their careers more than was evident. In further education the capital that Sam accrued from having once been an electrician was worth more.

The fragmentary picture of further education shown in Chapter 1 was not shown in the data shared by the Veterans. Although some had trouble conceptualising further education as a unitary field, their actions and career patterns showed that there was an observably distinct habitus to the field. For example, Amy's comments were revealing when she explained how she had moved into and out of FE, when in fact she had moved from working in colleges into further education in the community and work-based learning (Amy career map conversation). Amy may not have seen the connection but the fact that she, Donna and M were able to move between types of provider with little friction shows the shared habitus of a distinct field. Donna's uncomfortable experience of *habitus clivé* (Reay 2010) when teaching in school suggests that what makes further education distinct from other phases of education goes beyond solely the learners that they serve with the teachers themselves contributing to the unique environment.

Previous studies have presented a characterisation of further education teachers who cling to their vocational backgrounds as their distinction (Le Gallais 2009, Bathmaker and Avis 2013). The data given here showed that greater value was placed on their distinct, context specific, further education pedagogical expertise than vocational knowledge by the participants, if not their employers. The difference in findings may lie in the different characteristics of the participants and the amount of time spent in teaching. The Veteran status of my participants is significant in terms of distance from their original subject specialisms. I would also interpret that the ability and willingness to move away from their original subject specialisms is an element of veteran-ness.

The data collected also shows a clash with the public image of the further education teacher as an industrial trainer. An example, from a current (at time of

writing) government recruitment campaign, states 'If you have real-world industry experience, you already have what it takes to teach in further education' (DfE 2023). The idea that further education teachers are regarded as not real teachers was shown in the Context chapter and the Data chapter where the inconsistency of teacher training over the timespan of the participants' careers was discussed. The discussion concluded that the overwhelming emphasis on the vocational has devalued the need for pedagogical development and marginalised further education teachers amongst teachers in other educational sectors. The conclusion drawn from Chapter 5 Theme 3 showed that in all cases, the Veterans rejected this objectification in that all of them valued their pedagogical skills. Even M, who had not done higher pedagogical study, regarded his specialism as his pedagogical skill in engaging long-term prisoners rather than his vocational knowledge.

For Amy, Donna, Wendy and Mike taking multiple qualifications proved to be an important part of their process of self-reinvention as further education teachers. They originally saw themselves as outsiders and they were trying to find what counts as legitimate capital in their new arena but also to convince themselves that they deserved to be there. What the Veterans gained from their qualifications was an imbibing of the specific cultural expectations of their role and the invisible rules of the field. The process inducted them into further education's language use, attitudes, behaviours, values and new ideas of how their individual agency could be used within the parameters of the field. Once they had formed their new, evolving habitus, they were committed. They had changed in multiple ways, taking on new ways of thinking and seeing the world.

The data showed that higher pedagogical study through qualifications can have a role in maintaining and deepening commitment to teaching. The amount of time

that the Veterans spent speaking about their own academic studies in their narratives was unexpected. For five of the six Veterans, higher education pedagogical studies were remembered as important to them. This appeared to be distinct from continuing professional development which was not part of their narrative recollections.

The Data chapter explored how the qualifications acted, for some, as a badging for their professional transformation and for others, as a liminal space of emotional transition. The process of academic labour changed them and their relationship to their work. They gained a deeper appreciation of their work through academic study. The narratives showed how one piece of training often led to another, tying the participants more closely to their profession and increasing intrinsic motivation. This personal aspect of higher study was a separate impact to any influence that gaining the qualifications may, or may not, have had as symbolic capital on their career pattern.

In Lord Lingfield's (2012) report, that swept away the need for a further education teacher training qualification, he wrote about the 'fearfulness' that some practitioners they consulted felt about the loss of regulation, seeing it as:

a protection against unfair treatment by their employers or by government and its agents, even though they were aware that the power of those regulations was largely illusory (Lingfield 2012 p. 4).

The participants in this study had taken many qualifications and their experience did somewhat confirm Lingfield's assertion that the protection they provided from unfair practices was illusory. If employers wish to behave in unfair or even illegal

ways, qualifications are little protection. However, the requirement to gain a qualification for the job you are doing seems a minimal expectation.

At the time of writing, the future of further education teacher training is yet again, unclear. In 2022, the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill (2022) alluded to the improvements that would be made to training but due to the 2024 change in government these were left unfulfilled. The Learning and Skills Teaching apprenticeship standard, which does not include an embedded qualification remained. In line with the Skills discourse, employers presently are still firmly at the centre of further education teacher training. Large college-based employers are able to use apprenticeship levy funding to pay for their staff to undertake the apprenticeship inhouse rather than paying fees to universities or other providers. This may appear advantageous for education employers, but it must be questioned how well it will serve the teachers being trained in this way. The power lies with the employers who decide what is desirable or undesirable to be included in the training. Placing so much power in the hands of employers offers the temptation to focus training narrowly on skills that are useful to the employer and clearly aligned with the neoliberal agenda. The purpose of the training may become to pacify rather than awaken; to provide teachers who will comply with institutional processes and enact national policies rather than developing a personal reflexive disposition or critical examination of pedagogy; in short, to produce the 'skills trainer' that aligns with the image present in the dominant Skills discourse.

However, the change of government in 2024 has brought about a hopeful change in tone to policy. The 2025 'Post-16 Education and Skills' white paper promises to ensure quality in initial teacher training through a register of those eligible to provide training which suggests that all employers will not be able to train their new

teachers in a narrow institutionally focused way. Where the 2022 Bill focused on 'employer-led standards' (Department for Education 2021 p.36), the 2025 policy document places the further education sector itself as the arbiter of what is desirable in 'evidence-based' (DfE 2025a p.32) teaching. Although these changes are, as yet, fairly vague, it perhaps signals a change of direction in governmental policy towards recognising the unique, contextual character of further education pedagogy which would reflect the high importance placed on pedagogical study by the Veterans.

When looking back at their working lives, the learners were shown to be at the centre of the Veterans' recollections and what they valued as significant over time. Further education learners were not participants in this study, but they have emerged as perhaps the main characters of the story. The six Veterans have influenced the lives of thousands of young people and adults, not as economic units but as people. People who have often been badly served by schools, who enter further education looking for a place in a society that has already limited their options. The Veterans' narratives showed that they engaged in their work on a human level of connection with individuals and groups of learners. They refused the objectification of the skills instructor image, showing an alternative picture of a signature further education pedagogy based on compassion, connection and community.

#### 7.4 Limitations and implications for future research

The conclusions I can draw from the data collected are limited by the range of participants. If I was to attempt this research again, I would ensure that I had female participants from a vocational background. This would allow me to further investigate the interaction of the Skills discourse and patriarchal structures within

further education. I would also increase the types of provision represented to look further at the connections of habitus across further education. At the point in the data analysis when these limitations became apparent, I could have used targeted recruitment to try and broaden the findings. However, starting with a presumption that I was trying to prove would have been antithetical to the research paradigm.

The data collected for this thesis did not include pay but the differences in the career progression, working conditions and retirement options for the women created the suggestion of lower overall pay. It must be questioned whether the discrimination shown in the data for this thesis represents historical conditions or ongoing sectoral issues. The qualitative design of this thesis did not include the collection of large scale data sets on the gender pay gap in further education institutions. Further quantitative research to examine the pay and conditions of specific analogous groups such as teachers and middle managers across the various types of provision, could show if further policy regulation to enforce fair treatment is needed. Urgent research is required to ensure the spirit of anti-discrimination policies is not being undermined by reward scales based the perceived value of skills with the legal justification of market forces.

The reading for the research showed that there was a lack of feminist research on voluntary educational work. Feminist theories of unpaid work tend to focus on the domestic sphere of housework and childcare (Chen 2005, Gimenez 2019, Khan *et al* 2023) or have an emphasis on nurture (Blackmore 1996) rather than the type of workplace volunteering that the women Veterans took part in. The difficulties that women from working-class backgrounds face in breaking into a new arena would be an interesting subject for further research. The profound differences in the experiences of the women participants in this study would also suggest that there

is fertile ground for larger scale feminist research to find out how widespread or current the unfair practices are.

This thesis has shown the lasting beneficial impact that training had for four of the participants in developing their practice and generating a specific further education habitus beyond the instrumental. In applying this thesis to future research on practice, it would be interesting to compare the professional subject positions of further education practitioners trained via the employer stipulated apprenticeship model of teacher training (Skills England 2024) with those who are untrained or trained via a university model.

#### 7.5 Original contribution to knowledge

This thesis builds upon previous studies on further education teachers such as Bathmaker and Avis (2002, 2013), Simmons (2010), Esmond (2017), Atkins and Tummons (2017), Avis (2018) and Duckworth and Smith (2019) to support the understanding of further education teachers' commitment to their learners.

However, in contrast to Le Gallis (2009) and Bathmaker and Avis (2013) earlier work, the participants in this study have moved beyond an identification with their vocational histories towards fully inhabiting idiosyncratic professional identities.

This finding challenges the common further education trope of 'dual professionalism' (ETF 2025).

As detailed in 7.1, this study makes an original contribution to knowledge through showing the impact of the Skills discourse in marginalising women in what is a heavily female sector. I have drawn a direct link between the patriarchal assumptions of skill and the less favourable working conditions of the women in the study. I have characterised further education teachers as a class fraction but the

women were further disadvantaged within an already stratified field as a fraction of a fraction.

The evidence presented in this thesis challenges assumptions of the primacy of the vocational purpose of further education and the characterisation of further education teachers. The rhetoric of the Skills discourse which underpins the dominance of industry and skills training was shown to be insignificant in the way that the Veterans saw their roles and the impact of their work over the period of two decades. The image of further education teachers as skills trainers was shown to be not only reductive but obscuring of the value to society of the work being done by these Veteran teachers.

This thesis has generated new, if ungeneralisable, evidence of the unique class-based habitus of further education that was shown to unite a variety of provision types. In 3.3.4 I used Bourdieusian theory to characterise further education as ‘a mechanism for the reproduction of social inequality’ (Thompson 2019) through channelling learners into vocational or pre-vocational education. In this sense, further education is a part of the ‘making’ of class. However, the data showed that the relative comfort of the class-based habitus and class identification with the learners was a factor in the longevity of the participants. For the participants in this study, becoming a Veteran in further education was reliant upon finding an emotional connection to their work. The emotional connection kept them motivated and able to withstand the challenges of precarity and constantly changing policy.

This thesis has generated new understandings of the specialist, humanist, relational pedagogies (Noddings 1984) that further education teachers develop over time in relation to their contexts and learners. These pedagogies are specialist skills in and of themselves which are currently not sufficiently recognised or valued.

For example, the pedagogy that M has developed for his prisoners is very different to the pedagogy that Mike has developed for his pre-16 learners but both Veterans have learnt and adjusted over time to hone their skills to enable learning and personal growth for complex learner groups.

Through their practice the Veterans provide a cohesion that benefits students that would otherwise be lacking in an unstable and precarious educational sector. They are 'agents' of a particular kind of educational experience and habitus (Bourdieu 1977) that mitigates the constant churn of policy in further education and the pressure of the Skills discourse to concentrate on making money for employers. The Veterans are the preservers of a particular habitus that exists within the wide variety of further education contexts. In passing on that habitus, veteran-ness starts to move beyond age and experience in a job into a professional ethic that is not codified but embodied.

Veteran-ness could then be conceptualised in axiological terms. The title of this thesis is; 'Becoming a Veteran in further education: a vocation or vocational?' I would conclude that it is a vocation in the archaic sense. Having a calling to serve is the essence of veteran-ness.

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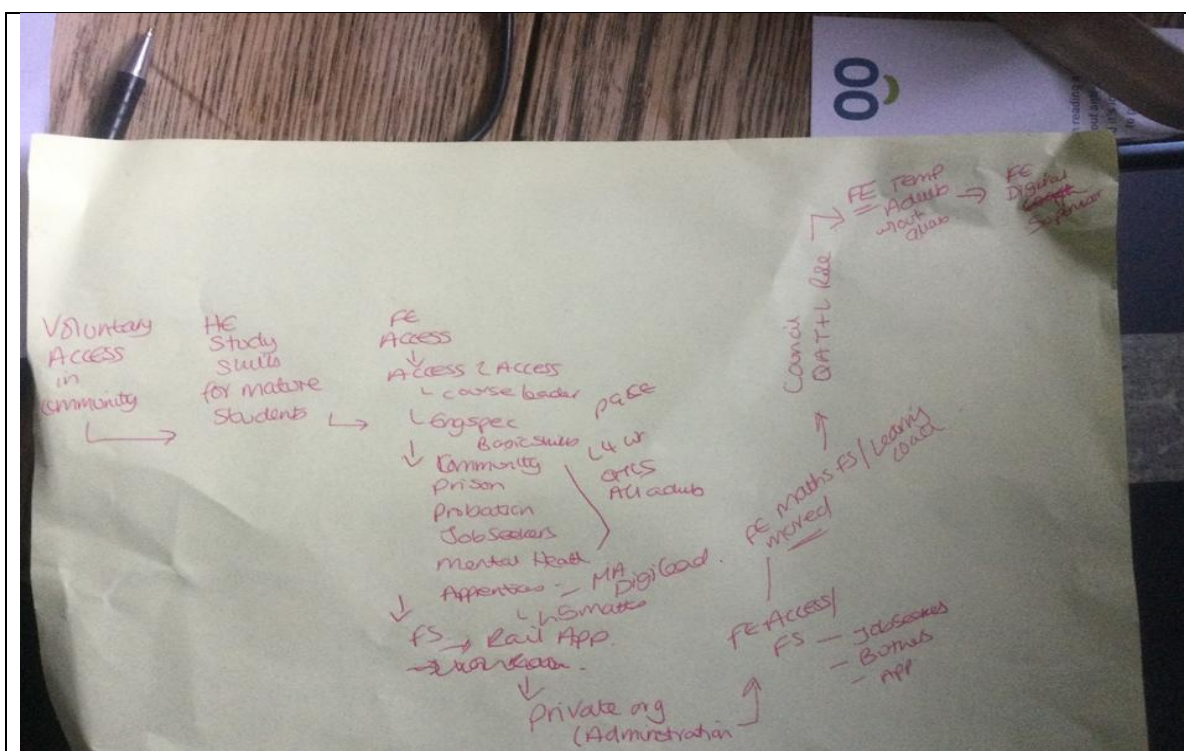
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## Appendices

### Appendix A Sample of Participant Narrative and Interview with first stage analysis



#### Section 2 Narrative

1. Ok, so...so...it was accidental for a start, I fell into teaching. I did a degree in social science and when I finished that I wanted to do outreach work for women and during the degree someone from outreach had come in and I went to see her and said I'd like to do some voluntary work and work experience. And I ended up working with some outreach people in the community where they were doing like an Access to Access course and so I got more involved on the Access to Access side. And having done an Access course myself I felt quite passionate

Abstract/theme and why chosen  
First contact with teaching. This incident acts as an introduction.

Orientation – the space of time is not stipulated. This is a personal story the only other character is the person who came out to speak to her student group.

Complicating action /aggressor/ who/what is feared?  
Choosing a career pathway after leaving university

Evaluation

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| <p>about it. And that's when I started to think about getting into teaching. The refuge was connected to FE because it was through an FE college, the Access to Access, but I didn't work for them just sort of helped out voluntary.<br/>145 words</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <p>Her original ambition was to work with women in the community. This is linked to her own experience, which is explained in more depth in the second interview. She uses the word 'passionate' about the Access course that had led her to university. Her original impetus to teaching was to change the lives of others as she had experienced herself.</p> <p>resolution –<br/>She is teaching without pay.</p> <p>coda – No<br/>Discourse/pattern – second chance at education/mature students</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <p>2...but whilst I was doing that I met some people from the local university and they were looking for someone to do some study skills teaching so that was paid work. So that was my first teaching experience, to do study skills teaching for mature under-grads who had got themselves onto a degree [ironic laugh about having used what she felt was the wrong terms] ...that were on a degree...but needed to learn how to structure an essay for instance, that kind of thing. So I did that alongside some other work at the university for a year maybe two years then the FE college came back to me and said that they had some paid hours doing Access to Access work and was I interested and I could do my PGCE alongside of it. At this point, in the evening, I had done the City and Guilds 7307 and then the 7407 and another City and Guilds one for Basic Skills just out of my own interest. So I left the university and went full time into the college and that was my proper sort of start to teaching in FE.<br/>194 words</p> | <p>Abstract – Briefly leaving FE for HE – this is an extended introduction</p> <p>Orientation – one - two years.<br/>Student group<br/>University</p> <p>complicating action – looking for a stable role</p> <p>Evaluation- The learners she is teaching sound very like Access students. It was revealing when she corrected herself. She originally said that the mature students had 'got themselves onto a degree' but quickly amended that to what she felt was more correct. She laughed as if it was a faux pa. This could be interpreted as Amy judging that the students had not gained entry to their degree course fairly or they had somehow blagged their way on. They were clearly lacking some of the skills that would be expected on a degree. However, I would interpret this as Amy superimposing her own self-image onto these students who are having a similar experience to her own. Using the lens of the second interview, Amy appears to have a sense of being an imposter into the world of HE. She is also doing other unspecified work alongside teaching so evidently does not have a full time teaching contract. She clearly has an ambition to teach in FE as she inserts an aside about undertaking ITT qualifications,</p> |

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|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <p>which are only relevant to FE at her own expense as evening classes. She must have been still in touch with the people at the FE college as she states, '...they came back to me...' This does not sound like a normal job application from an advertisement. The offer of doing her PGCE is seen as an attraction of the role. She clearly values her own professional development. At that point there would have been no rules about having to have a PGCE, she could have been satisfied with the qualifications she had already done but she wanted the higher qualification. This could again indicate an imposter identity.</p> |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Resolution – Getting the job she wanted                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Coda – Clear end. 'I left the university...'                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <p>3.I started working on Access as well as Access to Access but it became clear pretty quickly that Access to Access was my niche. It was just about the time that the Skills for Life stuff was coming in so alongside my PGCE I did the Level 4 Lit qual as well. I was in that job for just about, I think, 12 years...loved it...that was just about my best, favourite job ever because that was so much variety. So I did Access to Access and became a course Leader for the Access to Access</p> <p>95 words</p> | <p>Abstract- Access to Access course<br/>This has been chosen because of linear progression</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <p>Orientation – 12 years<br/>No other characters but the courses are sort of characters/subjects</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <p>Complicating action –<br/>Career progression</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <p>Evaluation – Again the ITT course is given as an insert to another story. She mentions Skills for Life. Part of this legislation was that people who did not hold a degree in English or Maths had to do a specialist qualification. Doing the specialist qualification alongside her PGCE and working must have been a very difficult thing to do but it is not elaborated further.<br/>This 12 year period is the longest lasting job in her career but it is only given 95 words.</p>                                                                                                                                               |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Resolution – Becoming course leader                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <p>4... then the Skills for Life thing took you into different strands and so I went off to</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <p>Coda – no<br/>Discourse/pattern – training</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <p>Abstract – Secondments into different areas of the sector</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

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| <p>work in prison on a secondment for three months...that was <b>not</b> nice, just not nice. It wasn't that bad a prison, it was Category C prison, so it wasn't the worst of the worse but it wasn't one of those nice sort of open prisons, it was really intense. Didn't like that so, I could have stayed on longer but I chose not to. I worked in probation though and I really enjoyed that. I worked on Communities and worked in the community with people with mental health and did Access to Access in the community. I worked with job Seekers and we did JSA and that sort of thing.</p> <p>I started to work with apprenticeships on there as well so I really enjoyed that job because it was really varied, and at that point, apart from the apprentices it was all adults.</p> <p>160 words.</p> | <p>Orientation -<br/>It is unclear if this follows the 12 years above or was part of it.<br/>Skills for life is a sort of character</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <p>Complicating action-<br/>Dipping in and out of different areas.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <p>Evaluation – This section includes a tremendous amount of variety but there is very little elaboration. The prison experience is described as 'intense' but not why it was so. Probation was 'enjoyed' but passed over in one sentence. Her enjoyment of working with apprentices is perhaps significant, as it may have influenced her later career choice when she moved into that area.</p> |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <p>Resolution-<br/>A happy time of development</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <p>Coda<br/>No this is not the end of the story but is separated as this is the positive part<br/>Discourse – the many facets of FE &amp; access SfL gave</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <p>5...but then as the funding for adult education started to get smaller and they brought Functional Skills in...so we were one of the pilot colleges for Functional Skills, so we started delivering Functional Skills about two years before it went everywhere else and they were looking to reduce the adult department and move people over to Functional Skills and because I had been part of the pilot, I was moved over without too much consultation about it. That was a bit of a blow.</p> <p>87 words</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <p>Abstract – The start of Functional Skills</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <p>Orientation – 2 years. This is a quite outward looking section.<br/>'they' = managers/hierarchy/institution Departments</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <p>Complicating action – the personal impact of national policy changes. The institution is the other character in this story.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <p>Evaluation – This section shows how institutions have to take difficult decisions in the light of governmental changes. Removing funding from one area and giving it to another means that the college had to move Amy. She does not feel she was consulted but she does understand the background to the move.</p>                                                                            |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <p>Resolution – moved against her will</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
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| 6. Oh I also did my MA Digital Lead stuff before that as well.<br>13 words.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Abstract – An aside about professional development but worth noting                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Orientation –<br>Time span not clear but was clearly done part time could be up to 3 years                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Complicating action                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Evaluation –. Amy inserts this important piece of information into her narrative about Functional Skills. There is no elaboration and it is slipped in because it was a simultaneous event with the surrounding story. Why she chose Digital Lead as a subject for her MA when she was teaching FS is not made clear. As this area later became a focus for her career, it must have been a personal interest that she wanted to develop. |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Resolution – Presume she passed it!                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
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| 7. So I started to teach Functional Skills which was a real shock after teaching adult because you just [deep sigh]...you're just not prepared for a group of motor vehicle students throwing things around. I had some things thrown at me in the classroom and I just wasn't prepared for it, as I'd been working with adults for about 8 years, to work with kids who were throwing cans of coke at you and pencils and hitting each other with key boards and you know you just...you know I really struggled with it. And um...it did effect my mental health at that point. I can remember just walking out and sitting in the car and crying because I didn't know how I was going to do it. But I kind of...I kept on...but not great, but I kept on...<br>138 words | Abstract – Behaviour management challenges                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Orientation – The time period is unclear<br>Younger students 16 year olds.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Complicating action –<br>In a job she has not chosen.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Evaluation – this is an unhappy period of her working life. She elaborates how the behaviour of the learners impacted her. She gives examples of the types of behaviour. She found the change from teaching adults a 'shock' and wanted to leave. Quite a lot of emotional language to describe how she was feeling at that time.                                                                                                         |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Resolution – She knew she didn't want to keep on with this job but at this point couldn't see a way out.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Coda – a link to how she got out of the situation<br>Discourse - negative behaviour linked to maths/English                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

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| <p>8.um...then they were looking for people to upskill to maths too so I did my Level 5 Maths at that point. I think because I was struggling in the classroom they gave me some apprentices to work with and they were railway apprentices who were from a different company on a course so I used to go out to the Railway Academy in [northern city] and teach the railway apprentices their English and maths and while I was out there the company that was running the apprentices they were looking for their own FS maths teacher and they offered me a job that was slightly less pay but with a company car and everything but it was in [another northern city] and I lived in [city 80 miles away] and it was a commute....but I've got to say that it was the right decision at the time to do it because it was the first time I had left FE in a long time and I really loved the job.</p> | Abstract – Apprenticeship teaching<br>Why chosen? A change of direction                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Orientation – time period unclear<br>Railway apprentices                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
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|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Evaluation – Once again, Amy throws in one sentence about a major piece of professional development. This would have been a two year part time course linked to the Skills for Life agenda. Having this qualification would have enabled the swap from teaching English to also teaching maths. In the first job that she mentions she is working externally to the college but is still employed by a college. She is teaching both English and maths. The Level 5 maths qualification has given her the same specialist status in both subject areas and would have opportunity to take a job with a private training provider. She sees this move as leaving FE. She does not fully explain why she took a job 80 miles from where she lived, for less pay. |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Resolution – She concludes that moving to the training provider was the right decision.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <p>9.I loved the railway apprentices they were really kind of rough and ready lads and a lot of them...it was inner city xxxx and there were some real stories there! I remember one coming in one day and he was like 'I'm sorry I'm late, I'm so sorry I'm late, the police raided us last night and they found my brother's gun under his bed' and it was like...yes...this was what lives they were living. But they were there because they really wanted to make a difference and unlike in FE</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Coda –<br>Not an end but concludes that she liked the job.<br>Discourse – what is FE?<br>Own Training                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Abstract - Working with the railway apprentices                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
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|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Complicating action – focused learners                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Evaluation – This is a more elaborated section where Amy uses anecdotes to illustrate why she liked teaching these learners so much. She credits the                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |

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| <p>where they are on a course and it's really hard for them to not pass that course and you kind of molly-coddle them, this is a different environment. I think this is what these lads needed and it worked. So they had a discipline system just like you would have in employment. They treated the apprentices like employees so if they played up, they got a verbal warning then a written warning, a second written warning and then they were dismissed. They had the right to appeal and sometimes they were allowed back on the course and sometimes they weren't but that caught on real quick amongst these young lads and they soon realised that if they wanted this career then they had to take it seriously. So the behaviour with them was much, much better because they knew that they had something to lose and they knew that they had something to gain and they knew that even though they hated English and maths, I was their means to that end. So it was much more respectful than working in the college with the teenagers.</p> <p>277 words</p> | <p>learners themselves and the apprenticeship system for the success of the learning. She does not appear to give any of the credit to herself or her own skills.</p> <p>Resolution –<br/>'Respectful' successful learners</p> <p>Coda – No<br/>Discourse – behaviour</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <p>10. I really loved that job. Not quite as much as the adults but I think that was probably my second favourite. Then one day we went into work and there was a group of people in a line, literally, a horizontal line in suits, that said 'your company has gone into administration, you are all out of work' and they tried to take my car off me and I was like 'I've got to get back to xxx' So I had to drive back to xxx and then they took the car. It was over like that, over-night. I was really devastated. I was ready to move to xxx to save the commute and everything but um...so that was with a private organisation which made me think, do I not want to be in FE?</p> <p>135 words</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <p>Abstract – Redundancy<br/>This has been chosen as a linear conclusion to the period of employment.</p> <p>Orientation – Period of one day. It is unclear if the people who arrived to close the company were bailiffs or receivers.</p> <p>Complicating action –<br/>Taking her car as well as her job.</p> <p>Evaluation – This is a dramatic incident which was clearly upsetting. She had thought that she was going to move house to a new city. The loss of the car is almost symbolic as she is suddenly immobile and unsure of what direction to take.</p> <p>Resolution – she is left in a quandary about what to do next.</p> |

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| <p>11. But when I took my next job it was back in an FE college. I had two part-time jobs. One teaching Access and one teaching Functional Skills so it was a bit of a balance, I was also doing a bit out in the community. I was working with job seekers. I was also working in like a, what do they call it where they kill the animals?...[abattoir] Abattoir, yeah. It was above the killing bit and you would have to walk through the pigs...it was horrible, it stank and you could hear the squealing and stuff. But that was teaching the apprentices there their English and Maths.</p> <p>108 words</p>                | <p>Abstract – Return to FE College teaching. Linear career narrative.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <p>Orientation – time period is unclear. Access learners, Job seekers and butchery apprentices.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <p>Complicating action-<br/>A step backwards in her career.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <p>Evaluation – She appears to have taken the job (s) she could get rather than one that she wanted. She doesn't have a full-time contract. She chooses to elaborate on the functional skills contract rather than the Access one. The FS teaching is shown to be difficult and perhaps quite at the margins of society. She chooses job seekers and butchery apprentices. The description of teaching the butchery apprentices is quite graphic and seems to have been an unpleasant working environment.</p> |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <p>Resolution<br/>Not enjoying the work.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <p>12. So, I did that for a while but not too long because then I moved to [city in south west England] and got a job [FE College] teaching maths only. For the first time it was only maths and not English and I did that for a couple of years. And then I got a Teaching Coach role alongside it and I really enjoyed the coaching of others and developing their skills. So I wanted to do more of that and less of the teaching because FS is really hard and really draining um and I think it's got a shelf life for teachers...I think you get to the point where you can't do it anymore. I was sort of looking for a</p> | <p>Coda – No<br/>Discourse/pattern unstable work</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <p>Abstract - New job in a new area of the country.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
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|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <p>Evaluation – She does not explain why she moved from the north to the south of England. She is pleased to be able to concentrate on a single subject rather than teaching both English and Maths. She still sees teaching FS as something she would rather not be doing. After two years teaching maths she gets an additional role which she sees as career progression. This</p>                                                                                                                          |

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| <p>learning coach role but then I had a bad experience...<br/>134 words</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <p>reinforces her determination to stop teaching.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
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| <p>14....I had some personal stuff going on at the time...my brother was dying...he had like weeks to live and I walked in a class in [place name] and there were...I don't know...about 20 odd kids and they were from different courses and they were vile and one of them called me a cxxt and I just melted down in class and walked out and I went into the staff room and said I am refusing to go back in there...and I think that was the beginning of the end of my teaching. It wasn't particularly handled well by my manager at the time. She said to me that it was the changing nature of the students, which I don't think is acceptable. I don't think there is any workplace on the face of the earth where you should be expected to go into work and be called names like that and just accept it.<br/>Over the years I've had all sorts of things from kids...I had one once where I had under 16 year olds that have been sent out of school and he sat there with my pencil case and he took all my pencils out and a lighter and he burnt them, burnt all of my pencils in front of me and there was nothing I could do because I couldn't stop him, I couldn't touch him, he wouldn't listen to me, I just had to sit there whilst he burnt the pencils.<br/>I think afterwards he did get thrown out of the college and not allowed back but it was just that helpless feeling at the time um so um it is a hard job and just having no resilience at the time and no support management wise, it was the beginning of the end. 298 words</p> | <p>Abstract – Behaviour management issues chosen to show why she did not want to teach any more</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
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| <p>15. Then I went for an interview at the local council and it was like a quality</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <p>Abstract – moving to a Quality role.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |

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| <p>job...like the learning coach but with their private organisations and it just felt ideal so I left FE for the second time and went to work for the local authority which was alright to a point. Private training organisations ...I just don't think they are education, not the way I see education and I really struggled to get them to see things the way I did and I had no back-up the people at the council because they were all about the money and ticking the boxes. So we had a grading system of the organisations which was colour coded you know green/amber/red and I had some of the organisations on amber, some on red and some on green and they would say to me, 'so this is a good area' and I would say 'no, this isn't good, this needs improvement' and they would say, 'but look at all these ambers, these are good' and I'd say 'no, green is good' and they'd say, 'but it's not red so it's good' and they just wouldn't listen and they didn't care about the quality of education. Maybe I've spent so long in FE that I've become institutionalised to it but their view of education and my view of education just weren't the same. They didn't care about people's experiences, they cared about statistics and ticking boxes and keeping Ofsted happy and for me that wasn't quality. I just needed to get out of there...</p> <p>260 words</p> | <p>Orientation -<br/>Local council</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
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| <p>16. So I went back into FE, this is about the fourth college now I think, um I took a temporary contract at a college down the road, it was only a year long and I knew that when I took it, teaching adults basics skills, back to where I started and it was a lovely temporary contract but it was just a temporary contract and it was nice because it gave me back my love of teaching and education which had been sort of damaged by the bad experience before I left and also by the bad experience at the council.</p> <p>101 words</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <p>Coda – The last sentence is a clear finish to this episode of employment.</p> <p>Discourse – managerialism</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
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| <p>17. And then at the college here now there was a digital learning supervisor role came out and I had the digital in the background even though I had never really had the chance to use it properly so I applied for that and here I am in this role now. So not teaching as such, though I do miss teaching, I do miss the classroom but I don't miss having things thrown at me and being sworn at and battling. Sometimes, I think, with FS you are just fighting fire and not really teaching, I don't miss that. With this job it's good, I have got a genuine passion with digital stuff and I get to spend my time doing a bit of training and working with staff so I'm getting the teaching experience in there and yeah, yeah, I think that's kind of the journey ...</p> <p>154 words</p> <p>Total narrative 2481 words.</p> | Abstract – Bringing her story up to date                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
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| <b>Whole narrative analysis</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <p>What is the shape of their career?<br/>Have they moved around further education or in and out of it?<br/>Comparing the narrative to the timeline, has anything not been narrated?</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <p>This participant has had a very varied career. She has had multiple employers and has worked in multiple parts of the sector. She does not define her periods with private training providers or in local authority education as being part of FE. However, within the definitions being applied in this study, they would be considered within the sector. She has also moved around the country with her work which she does not explain here. She did explain this off-tape but chose not have that part included; as it was personal.</p> |

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| How much time/words/elaboration are spent on various parts of their career and why?                                          | There are very few words given to her training and professional development. She mentions three different ITT courses prior to her PGCE, a MA and two subject specialist degree level courses. All of these combined are covered in just 85 words. This seems strange....                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Use of language and narrative devices.                                                                                       | She is able to describe her unhappiness using a variety of emotive terms. 'Struggle' is the most repeated word.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Is it an elaborated fleshed out narrative?                                                                                   | Parts of the narrative are fleshed out. The more elaborated sections are ones with emotional baggage attached. The longest section is one where she is most upset.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Is there a narrative structure?                                                                                              | There is a linear structure to the narrative. Occasionally, she adds something non-linear to amplify the point she is making.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Is there a narrative thread running through the smaller stories that links them together to show the vision of their career? | If there is a thread then it is her battles with behaviour management around functional skills teaching.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| What boundaries do they see and do they cross them?                                                                          | When she comes to boundaries that she doesn't like, she leaves the job and goes somewhere else.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Which government policies appear to have had an impact on their career.                                                      | Skills for Life had the biggest impact on her career. The funding attached to the policy allowed her to do various training courses and to move around the sector in various adult education settings.<br>She is well aware of changes of policy and how they influence funding and workforce strategies. She has experienced this when adult funding was cut in favour of FS.<br>The change to Functional Skills also had a big impact. She indicates that the compulsory nature of the sessions interferes with |
| Where do they see power?                                                                                                     | She is aware of how power comes down from government via funding. She also acknowledges the power operated through Ofsted. This is seen in section 15 when she believes that the council have been led into a 'box ticking' view of educational quality.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

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| Is there a tension around values?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Several. When in section 14, her boss dismisses her expectation that student behaviour should be dealt with, she leaves the job. Similarly, in section 15 she finds herself at odds with the values of the council who she feels are being overly influenced by Ofsted. |
| <b>Section 3 Work-Life Interview</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| First Interview                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Q1 I asked about high and low spots but we sort of drifted away from that.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <p>I left school at 15 with no qualifications. I had lots of jobs, bars, shops etc. I got a leaflet from the local adult education about adult GCSEs. I did an English GCSE and got an A, I had never got an A at anything so I went and did Access. It was a funny access course where you could do bits of all sorts of things and add it together. I did GCSE Spanish as part of it. At the end I still didn't feel ready for uni so I did A Levels.</p> <p>I think people who have been through FE themselves as mature students that's where the passion comes from because I really understand what a difference it made to my life because I was not in a good place before I went back into education and did quals and I was heading down quite a bad path...if you like...and it really was genuinely...it's a bit Educating Rita...that film just makes me cry every time because it really did.....oh god.....gosh....[crying]....</p> <p><i>2[Me]...it changed your life to that extent...?</i></p> <p>It genuinely did...and that's why I went into teaching ....[crying]....I wanted to ...I wanted to...be part of that and change people's lives...that's why I enjoyed the adult ed so much</p> <p><i>3[Me] yeah you know what it can do for people...</i></p> <p>A still slightly tearful] Yeah...but even with the functional skills...you know ...sometimes just being that one person who had made that young person's day.</p> <p><i>4Me]and it's interesting, what you were saying before, about when you took that Level 5 and experienced the frustration...</i></p> <p>A] Yeah, yeah ...you know I wasn't the best at school and I didn't have great time at school. I was on a good path at school but then when I chose my options I had to go to a different school</p> <p>Tearful] Sorry, I didn't mean to be like this</p> <p><i>Me] Don't be sorry, it's really heartfelt stuff...</i></p> <p>A] I really care about education because I know what it can do, if you get it right, I know what it can do and what difference it can make to people's lives....and I also come from a background where education's not valued at all in my family...at all...and they don't understand what I do or why I've done it. But I know that will be other kids out there that have families that don't understand and don't care so they need someone to show them that it's important and that person is their teacher isn't it? If they aren't getting the support at home then they need it in the classroom. And that's why I think it's important to know when it's your time to leave...I'd lost that passion in the classroom, I didn't want to be one of these that just went in and did the job...I didn't feel like I could keep giving..I just ran out of energy I think, for the youngsters um I didn't think it was fair on them, I think they need someone who can give them the energy and the support and lift them up...and I felt I had lost that.</p> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |

*5Me} but what you do now is so forward looking and with the pandemic, my god, wasn't it needed?..*

A] yeah...yeah...it's not the same as teaching but it's passing it down and getting the next lot of teachers to learn what they need to keep the learners focused and a lot of the teachers don't see that what they are doing is teaching the digital skills through their delivery, it's not just them using it in the classroom themselves, they are passing the digital skills and experience to the students. I apologise for the slight break down!

#### Commentary

Amy's interview did not go according to plan. After discussing her original narrative we started talking before I had the recorder on. She started again when I turned the recorder on and gave a life history that cast a lot of light on her feelings about FE and also why she had moved around such a lot. Some of what she said was too personal and she did not want it included. She did give more detail about her current employment.

#### Second Interview

Q2.1 In the first part we talked about all the jobs you had had and the Thinking of the whole sector were there high spots and low spots?

Amy – Thinking in terms of where I started, I probably started in Skill for Life at its high point. So, there were a lot of resources being thrown into it and there was a lot of work out there and a lot of training that went with it so when I first started on the access to access I had just done my PGCE but the college paid for me to do my level 4 literacy specialism

(yeah I did the same)

That sort of opened up a whole world of work then and that's when I started to leave the Access things behind because even then Access was starting to shrink a little bit. Skills for Life was everywhere and they were taking on so many staff I worked at xxxx for 12 years and the last 4 was functional skills. From that being a high, within 6 years it had started to shrink down to point where the college was looking for redundancies from in our team or people to move into FS and nobody wanted to move into FS. We were part of the pilot for FS so we all knew how bad it was. We had all gone in wanting to teach adults and then weren't going to teach adults. We were just told 'changes in funding' We had a new principal at the time and the rumour was that she didn't want us doing adult provision, I don't know how true that was. It seemed to be just resentment at the fact that there was less work. So we moved across to FS but a lot of people left. Some people went and started their little separate company. From what I have heard it is still going.

(a training company?)

Yes working with special needs with English and maths skills and working with the lower levels. When we first started you could teach units but they took away the opportunity to take units away so you had to move them up through the levels which for some learners that's not going to happen. They aren't going to do a level in a year and move up to the next level. That left them nowhere to go. Witht the units you could have them on the same level for three or four years doing different units. The people who set up on their own went back to getting funding for units. It's not really fair on those who are learning slower that you've

given them 9 months and then you've got to go up a level. Especially with the entry levels because they were exam based, you'd get them up through entry 1 entry 2 entry 3 and then some teachers really 'helped' them if you understand what I mean, but then it didn't help them because they were faced with Level 1 that they were never going to be able to do.

It was quite sad what happened to the sector, a lot of people left it at that point.

Q2.2 I also wanted to pick up on something you said about your pension. You've been in GFE but also in the private FE sector, has that effected your pension?

My pension got messed up by my present employer so when I first went into teaching, I didn't have a pension. It was at a time when no one was that bothered about pensions, there was no push to get a private pension. My ex-husband said I didn't need a pension.

(So you weren't in the TPS?)

No not at first but after I got divorced I thought I'd better go in to the pension scheme and I had been paying in for a couple of years before I came to this college and when I went on line to check my account it was empty. It took me 18 months of chasing to get it sorted out. Every time I went to the TPS they said it was the college and the college said it was the TPS. It went back to a previous college as well, I had started paying in with them. At the end of the 18 months I just said, you know what just give me the money back, give me everything. I got the money back eventually ...and this is where it becomes my fault and not theirs...I got the money back and went on holiday! So instead of doing the sensible thing and investing it back into a pension I had a jolly and didn't worry about it!

As time went on I thought I am not too far away from retiring I should do something but I didn't trust the TPS after that. I started one when I left here and went to the council but I was only paying in half payments so I didn't accrue very much. Then when I came back into GFE I am employed by a subsidiary company so it's not the TPS but I've only been paying into it for 3 years so my predication at the end is only £1,000 a year.

(Me:Oh wow!)

I know! ...don't know really. Some of it is my own fault just for acting irrationally, but not all of it . If it had just been smooth and the contributions had been made I would have just gone with it. Nobody will speak to you about pensions here.

There is a government web site but it is pages and pages and it takes forever because you've got links to this and links to that. The new scheme said that there were investment options but now say I don't have those options because I am too close to retirement. I don't really understand what it is I am paying into and the payments per month are so high but phew...the closer I get to retirement the more I think that I have to do something. A friend told me that I can take all the money out as a lump at the end but I don't know if that is even true. I think we should be educated. When I was younger there was no talk about pensions, you were just working and at the end getting your state pension. People that were paying into private pensions were...(searching for words) middle class rich people, you never thought about early retirement because retirement was not supposed to be at 68 it was supposed to be at 60 for women and you know no one has ever talked to me about it. I'm not stupid but I don't know what to do. I know I have made some bad decisions.

(Me: My pension's not great. When I left the NHS to have my first child, I cashed in my pension because you could and I wanted the money)

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| Yeah exactly, you do, you do things like that... I think my only option is in my property. Now my daughter has moved out and I am in the house on my own do I downsize now and have lower living costs or do I keep it and sell at retirement age and use the money to live on?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Points to note                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Sees pension difficulties as her 'own fault'                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Q2.3 Who do you see as powerful in FE?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <p>In FE? I suppose the government really but we all know that the government's power comes from money, rich people, business and that kind of thing. I think the future of FE is interesting because you've got people like Amazon and Google and Microsoft that have got huge education centres out there with all this free stuff and training and they are offering it for things that we are having trouble getting teachers for. So if you take something like Cyber security, it hasn't been around for long enough to get more experienced people coming out of industry to teach it plus the money they are paid in industry, as you know, is a lot less. If you go to Amazon and all that lot they've got so many free courses. They have got so much money and they can pay people to put together the resources. It may not be how we think education should be and I can't speak about the quality of it but they aren't going to care about that. When you look for a course you go for the cheapest, easiest option and people want to do things online so they can fit it into their lives. So why would you take out student loans to come to a college? Maybe if you are 18 and it's a natural progression but not if you are looking for a career change. Changing career was so easy in the 90s but if you are looking to change career now why wouldn't you look at the free online training that big corporations are offering? Someone joked to me the other day about Amazon Academy and I laughed and said, you do know that is real don't you? They had no idea.. they try to make it look impartial but it is obviously commercial.</p> <p>The digital learning worries me for my future in this job. Things change so fast and it is difficult to keep up. I look at the speed that, (lists the names of people that she manages) pick it up the new stuff at and I can't pick it up as quickly as they do. This is an area that is moving so quick and when I look at other colleges, they have people a lot younger than me in my role. I don't know if I can do this role until retirement. I'm 54. If you imagine where it's come from in the last 14 years to where it will be in the next 14 years, I don't know if I can keep up with it. The only advantage I have is that the education sector is so far behind industry and we are not really moving with it. We still have people who teach in Victorian style talk and chalk even though we are trying to encourage them not to, they are still here. While we still have people like that, then I've got a job but if all the teachers were younger and dynamic...you know what I mean? I would never be able to do this job out in industry because it would be way too fast for me. God knows where we will be in the next 14 years. When I think back to 2008...I started my masters in digital technology in 2010 and we were excited about I pads! It took me from finishing that in 2012, it took me nearly 10 years to find a job in digital education because all the jobs were digital technologist rather than digital learning. The college I worked for at the time paid for half of my masters</p> |

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| <p>because they wanted me to be the digital learning champion. A teacher rather than a technologist but by the time I had finished they weren't interested. (Yeah it's the 'learning' part that in the past has been missing. It has been all wonderful gadgets but it's the 'so what?' if it doesn't actually increase the learning then what's the point?)</p> <p>Yeah, I have noticed that colleges are starting to employ people with teaching backgrounds to do these sorts of roles rather than technologists. I went to xxx College last week and the head of digital there is a teacher. He has a team of technologist that do the techy bits. That is pretty much what I have to do.</p> |
| <p>Commentary</p> <p>Doubting the future direction of FE. Power is outside – unseen power of tech companies and unpredictable tech innovations to take education out of the hands of government.</p> <p>Fear of ageing?</p> <p>Amy is noticing a change in emphasis from subject knowledge to pedagogy.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |

## Appendix B Participant information sheet

### Introduction

#### **An exploration of the longevity of Veteran further education practitioners and the challenges they face in mediating policy and practice**

I would like to invite you to take part in my research project. The purpose of this leaflet is to give you information about the project and to help you decide if you would like to take part or not. You have been invited to take part because of your long service in the sector.

Having a long career in further education is quite a challenge. As a Veteran FE practitioner myself, I know how hard it can be. This project is trying to find out about the values that underpin practice for Veteran practitioners and whether those values have changed over time. I am interested in what your pathway into the job was and how your career has shaped-up. I would like to hear about your highlights and difficulties over the years and how national policies have impacted on your work.

### **Your Involvement**

If you choose to take part in this study, you will be making a commitment to speak to me either in person or online for about an hour or so. We would start the meeting by making a quick sketch outline and timeline of your career. I will be asking you to tell me about your career. I won't be asking you questions; I just want to hear your

own story as you remember it. The final part of the meeting would be a bit chattier. We will look back over what you have said together and chat about the things that have happened in further education over that same time period and how they effected your work.

**Important:** You will be anonymised and no institution will be identified in the research.

### **Giving your consent**

If you would like to take part in the research, please fill out the consent form that you have received with this information sheet and return the form to me as soon as you can.

### **What are the benefits?**

Taking part in this study is going to get you thinking and reflecting. It will bring back memories of the good times and the bad times, so please only agree to take part if you feel it will be a positive experience for you.

### **What happens to the information?**

All information collected during the project will be kept safely and confidentiality will be ensured in the collection, storage and publication of the material.

If you have concerns about how your personal data is to be used contact BCU Data Protection Officer [informationmanagement@bcu.ac.uk](mailto:informationmanagement@bcu.ac.uk) or +44 (0)121 331-5288.

Data Protection Officer, Information Management Team, Birmingham City University, University House, 15 Bartholomew Row, Birmingham, B5 5JU. Alternatively, you can complain directly to the Information Commissioner at Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF, further information available at [www.ico.org.uk](http://www.ico.org.uk)"

### **Other Information**

If you change your mind at any point, you can withdraw from the research. If you decide to withdraw, I will ask you if you would like to leave the information that you have already provided in the study to be used or have it taken out completely. Either choice is fine.

### **Contact Details**

Angela Hughes [angela.hughes@mail.bcu.ac.uk](mailto:angela.hughes@mail.bcu.ac.uk) I am a student at Birmingham City University.

If you want to make a complaint about this research project please contact [HELS\\_ethics@bcu.ac.uk](mailto:HELS_ethics@bcu.ac.uk)

Thank you for taking the time to read this information. Please sign the consent form that comes with this information sheet and return a scan of the signed sheet to me via email.

Nov 2021.