

Practitioner Perspectives on Higher
Education as a Preparation for
Employment in Public Relations in Ireland

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Abstract

This thesis is an empirical study of how practitioners understand the nature of public relations as an occupation in Ireland and how they view the role of higher education as a preparation for employment in this field. Given its recent history and association with higher education, there has been little research into this relationship. In addition to investigating practitioners perspectives on their own career backgrounds and the growth of undergraduate and professional education related to public relations, consideration is given to the skills, knowledge and attributes seen to be necessary for entry into the occupation.

Using an interpretivist approach and design, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of sixteen senior public relations practitioners in Ireland. One-half of the interview sample had received a formal public relations education and the other half had not. Drawing on a review of academic, professional and international literature on the development of public relations as an occupational field, a thematic analysis was applied to the interview data.

The main findings were that, firstly, practitioners supported the hiring of a graduate with a higher education qualification, although some were less concerned that this be a specific qualification related to public relations. Some practitioners without a formal education in public relations expressed regret and frustration about how much longer it took them to develop an understanding of the occupation without such a platform.

A second major finding related to the importance of theoretical understanding when public relations was located and studied within higher education. Higher education courses were held to impart more long-term depth, appreciation and criticality, in contrast to the focus on essential specific skills in many training courses and continuing education programmes.

A third important finding was the recognition of the contribution of higher education to the future development, health and strength of public relations in a fast-changing global and digital world. While there were concerns about core skills such as writing, there was an overwhelming desire on the part of practitioners to assist and join with higher education in developing programmes that equipped graduates with the knowledge and capabilities to operate in a diverse range of public relations roles and settings. These perspectives were echoed in the international literature on public relations.

Based on these findings, a new model of professional practice is proposed, one in which the industry, education and professional bodies work in a more integrated, collegial, collaborative manner in order to move the profession forward in Ireland. Styled the 'Integrated Professionalism of Public Relations', this model is designed to improve graduate capabilities and thinking, and ultimately benefit the public relations industry as a whole.

The Iceberg

Beneath every piece of scholarly work lie years of patient learning and accumulation, as well as torrid months or years of focussed thinking, research and reading. From below the waterline, the labour and investment done in these dark underwater seas sustains the small portion of the work that appears above it (Hayot, 2014, p. 118).

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Glossary

AHECS:	Association of Higher Education Careers Service (Ireland)
CEO:	Chief Executive Officer
CERP:	Confédération européenne des relations publiques (European Public Relations Confederation)
CIPR:	Chartered Institute of Public Relations (UK)
CIT:	Cork Institute of Technology
DIT:	Dublin Institute of Technology
DkIT:	Dundalk Institute of Technology
ETB:	Education and Training Boards
EUPRERA:	European Public Relations Education and Research Association
HE:	Higher Education
HEA:	Higher Education Authority
ICCO:	International Communications Consultants Organisation
IPR:	Institute of Public Relations (UK) (Now known as CIPR).
ITC:	Institute of Technology, Carlow
IOT/IT:	Institute of Technology
NFQ:	National Framework of Qualifications
NPRG:	Non Public Relations Graduate
PR:	Public Relations
PRCA:	Public Relations Consultancy Association (in Ireland)
PRE:	Public Relations Education
PRG:	Public Relations Graduate
PRII:	Public Relations Institute of Ireland
PRSA:	Public Relations Society of America
QQI:	Quality Qualifications Ireland
RQ:	Research Question
TD:	Teachta Dála (Member of the Dáil – Lower House of Parliament)
VEC:	Vocational Education Committee

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Chapter One

Introduction

This preliminary chapter will introduce my research topic beginning with explaining what this research is about and why this study is important. I also discuss the research objectives of this study. The final section of this chapter includes the organisation and structure of the study with a brief description of the contents of each chapter.

What this Research is about

This thesis is concerned with public relations (PR) and more specifically the role of education within the occupation that is known as public relations. Over the past twenty years, public relations practice and education have grown prodigiously in Ireland and internationally. The skillset and attributes required of entry and senior level continue to challenge all actors in public relations. Yet the occupation has no barrier to entry and requires no formal qualifications or continual professional development (CPD).

This study specifically investigates senior PR practitioners' perspectives on the role of public relations education within higher education. Sixteen practitioners were interviewed. Eight of the participants had a formal public relations qualification and eight had not. The reason for this selection process was to reflect the recent history of public relations in Ireland where many senior participants working in the occupation have not received any formal education specifically in public relations. I believed it was important to get their insights and views about the occupation of public relations and relevant education of future practitioners. By exploring the views of practitioners, useful insights into best practice such as their views on higher education and on the importance (or not) of formal PR education, and the key skills, knowledge and attributes required by the practice will be examined, and hopefully stimulate discussion in order to enhance the professionalism of public relations in Ireland.

Research Objectives

The research objectives provided an overall framework within which to review the relevant literature and primary research findings that will contribute to an understanding of public relations in the context of education and its professional standing in Ireland. However, before objectives were formulated, it was important to have an overall question that guided the research. Thomas (2009) highlighted the importance of getting the research question right and advocated that this is the foundation stone for the whole project. Therefore, the overall question proposed in this research was **“What is the role of higher education in Ireland in preparing public relations graduates for entry into the occupation?”** This question guided and lead to the core objectives for this study which include:

- To outline the contemporary history and development of public relations and public relations education in Ireland.
- To investigate the role of higher education as a preparation for employment in public relations in Ireland.
- To ascertain what skills, knowledge and attributes are necessary for entry level graduates into the occupation.

The above objectives guided my search for secondary literature to ascertain the necessary background information of this field, and to establish what other empirical studies have been done on this topic.

Why this Research is Important

I believe that this study is important from both an academic and a practical perspective. Academically, when previous research in this area was explored it was found that there was a gap in current literature on practitioner perspectives in Ireland. Public relations in Ireland is taught at various levels from short professional training courses to full-time postgraduate levels in Ireland. In the context of higher education, there was a gap in research into the role of public relations within HE. There was also an absence of a rigorous body of knowledge

from researchers in Ireland that scholars could draw from. This research brings to light, for the first time at doctoral level in Ireland, important information and insights on the personal, educational and professional profiles of senior Irish PR Practitioners at this time.

Secondly, in terms of practical significance, the findings of this study may be helpful to a range of actors involved in public relations including professional bodies, practitioners, educators and students.

Personal Context

I presently work as a public relations educator in an Institute of Technology (IOT) in Ireland. I have been working in this role since 2004 before which I worked as a public relations (PR) practitioner in Ireland in both the consumer and corporate PR sectors. As an educator, I am interested in how higher education plays a role in preparing graduates for entry into industry and in particular what the perspectives are of senior public relations practitioners about PR education and HE education in general. However, the main reason for pursuing this doctorate in education is because although I have a BA (in Theology and Economics) and an MA in Public Relations, I want to further fulfill my role as a educator in higher education by developing academic and research skills in order to be the best professional I can be in my discipline.

Outline of the Thesis

In order to gain an insight into how public relations education within higher education can support and strengthen to improve outcomes for public relations graduates and postgraduates in Ireland, the starting point was to review the literature in the context of the overall research objectives. The next three chapters therefore examine literature of relevance to the public relations sector, with specific reference to Ireland. Specifically, chapter two examines public relations as an occupation in Ireland and asks if it is a craft or a profession. Chapter three scrutinises public relations and its development in Ireland. Chapter four critically examines the role of higher education, particularly in the context of employability and skills, knowledge and graduate attributes.

Chapter five describes the research design and methodological approach. The methodologies utilised in existing studies on public relations education are reviewed in justifying an interpretive, qualitative research design, as the optimal approach to address the research questions.

Chapters six to nine provide the findings of the research. This is where I present the themes that emerged from my interview data.

Chapter ten discusses the findings and also probes whether or not there was a difference between the two sets of actors interviewed. This chapter also proposes a new model called the 'Integrated Professionalism of Public Relations' model. The aim of this model is to increase awareness of the importance of *integration* of the traits of professionalism in public relations.

Conclusions and recommendations are located in the final chapter. This chapter moves from a summary of the findings to highlighting their importance in the context of objectives set out in this research. This chapter contains the *so what* and the *now what* answers and highlights why it was important to do this research.

References and appendices are at the end of the dissertation.

The next three chapters will explore the literature in the field of public relations.

Chapter Two

The Occupational Field of Public Relations

This chapter reviews relevant literature in the context of arguments and debates about public relations as an occupational field. The chapter starts with an attempt at explaining what public relations 'is' and expands on terms that are used in public relations literature including the 'Excellence Theory', the 'dominant coalition', role typologies and whether or not PR is a craft or profession. The reason for highlighting these particular topics of academic literature is because these concepts form part of the overall theoretical framework when analysing the views of PR practitioners in Ireland in relation to the occupation of public relations and PR education. This chapter also observes what varieties of occupations a public relations professional could work at.

It is worth reprising here the overall objectives of this research as they have guided the literature to get the necessary background information and to establish what other empirical studies had been done on this topic.

The objectives of this research:

- To outline the contemporary history and development of public relations and public relations education in Ireland.
- To investigate the role of higher education as a preparation for employment in public relations in Ireland.
- To ascertain what skills, knowledge and attributes are necessary for entry level graduates into the occupation.

Using the above objectives as an overall framework, this chapter and the next two chapters provide a review of the relevant literature that contribute to an understanding of how public relations can be defined, what public relations is as an occupational field and how the field has developed in Ireland. Firstly, an attempt is made to define what public relations 'is'.

What is Public Relations?

Given the complex nature of public relations and the diversity of occupations within which a graduate can be employed, it is not possible to describe in one sentence (or in fact many sentences) what exactly public relations 'is'. I argue that this is understandable given that public relations draws on many fields including management, media, communication and psychology (Fawkes, 2012). Or, as noted by Bentele (2004), public relations cannot only be thought of as an organisational activity, but also as a social phenomenon which has societal functions and impacts on society and its subsystems like the political system, the economic system, the cultural system or the media system (p 486).

Grunig and Hunt (1984) define public relations as the *'management of communication between an organisation and its publics'* (Grunig and Hunt, 1984, p 6) and emphasise: *'this definition equates public relations and communication management'* (ibid p 6). Cutlip et al (1971) defined public relations as *'the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and the publics on whom its success or failure depends'*, (p 6). Grunig & White (1992) wrote that in actual practice, public relations has no consistent definition, rather public relations is *'what public relations people do'* (p 32).

In earlier years, Harlow (1976) looked at no fewer than 472 definitions of public relations in the 1970s, but Galloway (2013) questions the value of this seemingly endless quest to define PR's identity and posits that setting out to define public relations is normally a matter of positivist affirmations that something 'is' this, 'is' that. Galloway proffered a theological apophatic approach – one based on what may not be said about the profession. In religious tradition, the word *apophatic* implies the belief that God can be known to humans only in terms of what He is not (such as 'God is unknowable'). An apophatic approach seeks to establish understanding through clearing away debris via a process of negation: *If one wants to know what PR 'is', how can one proceed if, like the Deity, its essence is at least somewhat*

elusive and not amenable to being circumscribed with positivist boundaries? (Galloway 2013, p 151).

Conversely, Van Ruler and Vercic (2004) defined the field of PR by developing four key characteristics of public relations including reflective, managerial, operational and educational. These four aspects are illustrated in the table below.

Table 1 - Four Characteristics of Public Relations

Public Relations Roles	Comment
Reflective	To analyse changing standards and values and standpoints in society and discuss these with members of the organisation in order to adjust the standards and values/standpoints of the organisation accordingly. This role is concerned with organisational standards, values and views and aimed at the development of mission and organisational strategies.
Managerial	To develop plans to communicate and maintain relationships with public groups in order to gain public trust and/or mutual understanding. This role is concerned with commercial and other (internal and external) public groups and with public opinion as a whole and is aimed at the execution of the organisational mission and strategies.
Operational	To prepare means of communication for the organisation (and its members) in order to help the organisation formulate its communications. This role is concerned with services and is aimed at the execution of the communication plans developed by others.
Educational	To help all the members of the organisation become communicatively competent, in order to respond to societal demands. This role is concerned with the mentality and behaviour of the members of the organisation and aimed at internal public groups.

Source: Van Ruler and Vercic (2004, p6).

By distinguishing public relations within the four characteristics highlighted above, Van Ruler and Vercic (2004) are referring first of all to public relations as the reflective concepts of an organisation and secondly to a professional function at a managerial, operational and educational level.

Society tends to view public relations from different perspectives. Public relations is ‘trivialised, marginalised and demonised’ (Macnamara 2014, p 739) in public discourse

ranging from TV shows such as *Absolutely Fabulous* to award winning movies such as *Thank you for Smoking*. Additionally, Anthony (2012) asserted that when public relations is seen through the prism of works such as Adam Curtis's *Century of the Self* and Nick Davies's *Flat Earth News*, it is viewed as a 'profession that has endowed sectarian interests with the ability to manipulate entire populations' (Anthony, 2012, p 1). Additionally, according to Lages and Simkin (2003), contemporary society generally views the public relations function from one of two perspectives. First, there are those who discern it to be a mutually beneficial function benefiting both publics and the management (Grunig et al 2002). Second, there are those who identify it as being manipulative to the detriment of the publics, (L'Etang and Pieczka 2006).

Thus, there are those who identify the occupation as being controlling and believe that organisations use public relations to attain outcomes that are damaging to publics, (L'Etang and Pieczka, 2006). However, there are others who perceive the function as being mutually beneficial, benefiting from the use of two-way communication to achieve the company's goals with no negative effect on its publics (Grunig et al 2002).

However, given that there is no universally accepted definition of PR, it is equally important to highlight the perspectives or conceptualisations of public relations by theorists in academia. Bardhan and Weaver (2011) noted that in the 1990s, PR scholarship started engaging in paradigm debates and Tench and Deflagbe (2008) stressed the importance of the awareness amongst students, practitioners and academics that scholars use different theoretical perspectives to engage with public relations. These perspectives are expounded upon in the following paragraphs.

The perspective that has dominated the field of public relations was developed by Grunig and Hunt in 1984, and is known as the 'Excellence Theory'.

The Excellence theory is fundamentally Systems Theory as public relations is seen as being part of an organisational system, contributing to that system's efficiency and effectiveness. Grunig and his co-author Hunt have been referred to by many scholars (L'Etang and Pieczka 2006; Botan and Hazleton 2006; Moloney 1999) as arguably the 'thinkers with the most

contemporary influence in teaching and researching public relations' (Moloney 1999, p139). The Excellence Theory involves two distinct types of organisational public relations models – symmetrical and asymmetrical.

The symmetrical public relations function attempts to achieve mutually satisfying relations between an organisation and its publics. This is in contrast with asymmetrical public relations, which is used by companies wishing to synchronise their behaviour with that of their publics. (Grunig et al, 1992).

Grunig and Hunt, (1984) identified four public relations practice models – press agency/publicity, public information, two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical – whereby:

- press agency/publicity is a highly intuitive model of public relations practice, the sole purpose of which is to promote an individual, an organisation, or a product, therefore encouraging a one-way flow of information to the public;
- the public information model emphasises the dissemination of accurate information to the general population and is based on one-way flow of communication from an organisation to its publics;
- the two-way asymmetrical model communication focuses on a two-way flow of communication, with organisations sending messages to publics and then receiving feedback from those publics; and
- the two-way symmetrical model concentrates on achieving mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics. (Grunig and Hunt, 1984, p22).

The models highlighted above are therefore produced from the combinations of two dichotomous dimensions: direction (one way vs. two way) and balance of integrated effect (asymmetrical vs. symmetrical), (J.E. Grunig and L.A. Grunig 1989). Each of the models as noted by Kitchen (1997) describe a set of values and a pattern of behaviour that characterise the approach taken by a public relations department or individual practitioner to specific programmes or campaigns. The way most public relations departments and practitioners operate could be fitted within one or more of these models. Grunig et al (1992) recognised that in order for public relations to be considered a management function, either one or both of the two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical models must dominate. Following further research, Grunig and White argued that for PR to be excellent, it must be 'symmetrical, idealistic, critical and managerial' (Grunig et al 2002, p 307). Essentially the

excellence study recommends that PR must be managed strategically - and that at departmental level there should be a single or integrated PR department separate from marketing and reporting to senior management and led by a senior practitioner (Berg, 2015).

However, symmetrical public relations theory acknowledges the pre-eminence of what is known as the 'dominant coalition' in making organisational decisions and influencing public relations practices. In essence, this 'dominant coalition' is where those holding organisational power are members of an inner circle (Berger, 2005). Grunig et al (2002) referred to the 'dominant coalition' as:

'the group of individuals within the organisation who have the power to determine its mission and goals. They are the top managers who "run" the organisation. In the process, they often make decisions that are good enough to allow the organisation to survive but designed primarily to maintain the status quo and keep the current dominant coalition in power'. (Grunig et al. 2002, p 141).

This *dominant coalition* will be important to examine again, once the views of PR practitioners in Ireland are being analysed, in order to establish the state of the profession in Ireland. This is important because one of the key assumptions of this 'dominant coalition' is that PR practitioners will do the "right" thing once located within the coalition and not only can the professions' status be advanced but that it can also allow practitioners to help organisations, (J.E. Grunig and Hunt, 1984; Broom and Dozier, 1986). Although the Excellence Theory plays an important part of my theoretical framework, it is important to highlight its limitations.

Many critics (e.g. Motion and Leitch, 1996; Weaver 2001; Karleberg 1996; Pieczka 1996; Leitch and Nielsen 2001; Edwards and Hodges 2011), question whether being members of the dominant coalition have served stakeholders and society as well. In fact, Xifra (2016) asserted that he did not want to be a '*victim of the dominant paradigm of public relations*' (p 16) and instead suggested that public relations should be seen for its tolerance to many different perspectives in its discipline. Waddington (2012) argued that in the era of the social web, placing an organisation or brand at the centre of every diagram appearing to control

communication and relationships, as is done by Grunig/Hunt (1984) and Grunig/Grunig (1992), is an issue.

Additionally, critical discourse analysts (e.g. van Dijk 1993), claimed that powerful social actors and institutions have organised their media access by '*press officers, press releases, press conferences and PR departments*' (p 256) implying that public relations practitioners more than play their part in contextual, interactional, organisational and global forms of discourse control. Therefore, Berger (2005) suggests that practitioners should adopt a more activist role, carrying out actions to support and supplement advocacy in the organisation and larger social system.

Additionally, some theorists such as Motion & Leitch (2007) write about moving beyond the focus of Grunig's 'Excellence' paradigm, towards an understanding of public relations as discourse practice with power effects. Their focus was on Michel Foucault and his work on discourse, power/knowledge and subjectivity. Here they argued that by conceptualising public relations from a power/knowledge perspective, there is a shift from the domain of business where it is understood as a commercial practice, toward the discourse domain of politics, where it is understood as a power effect that '*produces and circulates certain kinds of truths*' (Motion and Leitch, p 268).

Ihlen and van Ruler (2007) broadened the theoretical scope of public relations studies by applying the work of a group of prominent social theorists including Jürgen Habermas, Niklas Luhmann, Michel Foucault, Ulrich Beck, Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens, Robert Putnam, Erving Goffman, Peter L. Berger, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Bruno Latour, Leon Mayhew, Dorothy Smith and Max Weber. Ihlen and van Ruler (2007) suggested that social theory can help make sense of public relations at the societal, organisational, and individual levels when examined from the perspectives of these scholars.

Separately, Holtzhausen (2002) argues for a postmodern activist perspective allowing for critical empowerment. Radford (2011) argued that to have a postmodern perspective allows one to consider public relations as a narrative and as a way of talking about the world, the people in that world and public relations' relationship with those people. More recently

Holtzhausen (2014) has suggested that focus should deviate from providing direct critiques of specific public relations theories and focus more on the '*nature of public relations in the Western world and the possibilities of practice to bring about a more just and egalitarian society*' (p 1).

Additionally, Sriramesh and Verčič (2012) suggest that public relations needs to be looked at in other contexts such as from a cultural perspective. When public relations operates in its managerial context, it operates as a specific form of management of communication and relationships. Therefore, Sriramesh and Verčič (ibid) suggest that public relations equally needs to be looked at in the context of culture and to talk about societal, organisational or occupational culture where not everything should be managed. Similarly, Edwards and Hodges (2011) argued that Grunig's singular focus on organisation excluded the social world in which those organisations operate.

Thus, in highlighting the many different perspectives that scholars have approached public relations with, it seems that the ontological and epistemological focus of the field is shifting towards a more socially constructed nature of the field. In fact, Ihlen, van Ruler and Fredriksson (2009) purport that in order to understand the role of public relations in building trust or creating mistrust and in developing - or destroying - a company's license to operate, public relations also needs to be studied as a social phenomenon.

Hutton (1999) argued that the field of public relations has left itself vulnerable to other fields that are making inroads into the PR domain by not developing a central paradigm. But I would argue that different perspectives that question dominant theories and offer alternative ways of understanding the role and function of public relations in practice, are important. As Kuhn (1970) proffered in the postscript of *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, '*it is not the presence of a paradigm that results in maturity for a particular field – but rather its nature*' (p 177). Therefore, what is the nature of the occupation of a public relations specialist? This is examined in the next section.

What is Public Relations as an Occupational Field?

The diversity within which a public relations practitioner practices his/her occupation is extraordinarily broad. Lattimore et al (2012) noted that public relations serves all types of organisations including governmental organisations and agencies, non-profit organisations and corporations who have embraced public relations and set it to work, recognising it as a means of increasing organisational effectiveness in a complex and changing environment. Moloney (2006) highlighted three different areas where public relations flourishes in democracy's foundational institutions – namely politics, markets and the media.

As public relations continues to evolve, the public relations specialist needs to understand the needs of all the relevant publics of a company or an organisation – *'people who can advise on how the company might position itself in relation to all whose perceptions might be vital to its wellbeing'* (Elliott & Koper, 2003, pages 26-27).

Employees entering the occupation of public relations at entry level do so as either as an PR *account assistant* in a public relations consultancy or as a *press officer* in an inhouse position. The former can represent a range of clients whereby when working inhouse, a press officer works on behalf of that particular organisation. Essentially, the occupation of public relations can be classified as comprising of:

- The consultancy or advisory sector, made up of organisations or individuals providing public relations to third parties – known in the occupation as *clients*.
- *In-house* public relations service providers who are employed by organisations of various profiles, size and disposition to effect relations with their relevant publics. (PRII, 2014).

Interestingly, in lecture notes sourced (previously unpublished) from the first ever public relations course in Ireland in 1951, the lecturer said:

A major function of PR is advising the head of the organisation and interpreting of the public mind in order to assist in the formulation of organisation policy. It is fruitless to employ a PRO and not use him for this primarily designed function. (MacSweeney, 1951).

However, public relations practitioners in Ireland and elsewhere, enter the occupation as either technicians or managers. Practitioners perform roles as either managers or technicians (Dozier 1992). To many critics, the work of a public relations practitioner seems to be *'unprincipled, unethical and atheoretical'* (Grunig & White, 1992, p 32). References to *spin-doctors* abound but Moloney (1999) asks if perhaps it could be that the general public's attitude to public relations is comparable to the attitude it has towards estate agents, journalists, lawyers and politicians – *'we do not like them, but will use them if needs be and when you get to know them, they're quite nice and helpful really'*, (Moloney, 1999, p 27).

The Public Relations Institute of Ireland (PRII) completed some research on salary levels in Ireland in April 2016 and found that the average guideline salaries for public relations in Ireland started at €23,500. A breakdown can be seen in the following table.

Table 2 - Range of Salaries for Public Relations Practitioners in the Republic of Ireland

Public Relations Position	Salary
PR Account Executive	€23,500 - €39,000
PR Account Manager	€29,500 - €55,000
PR Account Director	€52,500 - €80,000
PR Divisional Directors	€81,000 - €125,000

(Source: PRII 2016)

Table 3 - Range of Salaries for Public Relations Practitioners in Northern Ireland

Public Relations Position	Salary
PR Account Executive	£16,000-£25,000
PR Account Manager	From £30,000
Senior management roles such as PR director or head of corporate affairs	£40,000 to £100,000

(Source: Grad Ireland 2016)

The above tables show what the average salaries are for PR Practitioners in Ireland, including the Republic and Northern Ireland. Interestingly, in earlier years, a salary of £1,613 for the PR position in Posts and Telegraphs was referred to in a Dáil (Parliament) debate in 1957, after which politician Mr Jack McQuillan quipped that the appointment must be *‘of a very responsible nature if such a salary had been assigned’*. (Dáil Debate 1957).

Thus the salary levels of public relations practitioners were well paid from the outset in Ireland. In research completed by Beurer-Zuellig, Fieseler and Meckel (2009), the average annual salary of a full-time communication professional in mainland Europe was €75,000 compared to an average income of €45,000 in Eastern Europe. In the UK, research completed by the CIPR (2015) revealed that the average pay for public relations professionals is £46,629.

However, it is of concern that research on salary levels show a pay inequality gap in favour of men. For example, Beurer-Zuellig et al (2009) revealed that the average annual salary of a woman holding a managerial function in communications was €75,000 while males command an average salary of €95,000 (p 278), whilst the CIPR (2015) research showed that on average, a woman employed to do exactly the same public relations job as a man is paid £8,500 less. This will be examined later in this thesis when discussing gender balance within the occupation of public relations.

Irrespective of salary, this dichotomy in the perception of public relations has contributed to the diversity in the occupational roles which practitioners work in including “public affairs”, “public information”, “community relations”, “corporate communication”, “media relations” and “external relations” (Lages and Simkin 2003). The wealth of terminology has resulted in lack of clarity in the minds of the general public. Additionally, O’Dwyer (2005) noted that the negative inferences nurtured by media commentary on some public relations exercises lead organisations to consider alternative terminology for their public relations function, thereby increasing terminology and further confusing the general public.

Moloney (1999) highlighted the irony of public relations when he said:

‘It makes for a rich, illuminating irony.....that an activity which wants to produce the outcome of good reputation and mutual understanding and goodwill for its employers/clients cannot produce that outcome for itself’ (Moloney, 1999, p 25).

However Cutlip (1994) noted that whatever one’s title is - whether it is propagandist, press agent, public information officer, public relations, public affairs, political campaign specialists - the aim is the same: to influence public behaviour. The occupation therefore of public relations can be broad and diverse but the professionalism of public relations is examined in the next section.

Professionalism

Before beginning to examine professionalism within the public relations sector, it is important to clarify what is meant by the terms profession, professionalisation and professionalism. The reason for the importance of such clarification is to enable a discussion around questions such as those noted by Horn (2016) which include:

Is it about an occupation becoming a profession, or about the individual development of professionalism or about the formation of a professional identity? (Horn, 2016, p130).

Given that the focus of this study is on practitioner perspectives of public relations education, the question most relevant is about the occupation becoming a profession. Therefore, in order to ascertain the status of the professionalism – or not – of public relations in Ireland, the three terms profession, professionalisation and professionalism are unpacked in the following paragraphs.

Profession

Traditionally, the term *profession* was used to differentiate some occupations from other occupations by certain criteria. For example, Ehling (1992) noted that as an initial construct at the one end we have the concept of a successful athlete who turns ‘professional’ meaning s/he will become engaged in sport for pay. At the other end, Ehling (ibid) went on to offer an

alternative construct of a professional as a person occupying a particular kind of position obtained following extensive education such as a lawyer or doctor completing a certain level of examination in order to enter their chosen profession.

In relation to public relations specifically, Sha (2011) noted that the characteristics of a profession include ‘standardised education grounded in a theory based body of knowledge, professional associations, codes of ethics, accountability and public recognition as well as accreditation or certification’ (p 121). These characteristics are explored in this thesis in the next chapter, when expanding on the development of public relations in Ireland. However, suffice to say here that tensions and concerns have been expressed by some theorists including Fitch (2014) and Sha (2011) indicating the polarisation of the occupation of public relations because of the non-accreditation of some practitioners and no formal requirement to complete continual professional development (CPD). Thus, the question of whether or not practitioners are or are not members of relevant professional bodies will be an important one to explore when interviewing practitioners.

Professionalisation

Yang and Taylor (2014) wrote that the professionalisation of a field allows certain occupational practices to be acknowledged by society and also allows for maintaining autonomy in the practice (p509). Professionalisation indicates the process by which an occupation becomes a profession. This process is expounded upon in the next chapter of this thesis when writing about the contemporary character of public relations in Ireland where the significant growth of public relations in the last twenty years, both from an industry and education perspective is highlighted. Pieczka and L’Etang (2006) noted that education plays a significant part in the process of professionalisation ‘by contributing to the legitimising process of social acceptance and by helping to define public relations expertise and the scope of its operation’ (p276).

Professionalism

When writing about professionalism, Durkheim (1957) referred to the ‘collective power’ (p 7) that stands above the individual. Durkheim (ibid) wrote that since society as a whole feels

no concern in relation to professional ethics that there should be special groups in society, within which these morals may be 'evolved and whose business it is to see they be observed' (Durkheim, 1957 p 7). Similarly, Leeper & Leeper (2005) wrote that 'professions are a stabilising force in society, protecting vulnerable people, social values and providing quality service' (p 646).

However some academics argue against professionalism. For example, Steiner (1999) sees a real danger in defining PR professionals in terms of general skills and values, instead of focusing on the multifaceted world in which they participate as individuals. He believes that PR graduates will not be distinguished individually and that the overarching pursuit of professionalism may encourage '*mindless compliance rather than critical and creative thinking*' (Steiner1999:13). Additionally, Pieczka & L'Etang (2006) note that critical reflection is needed to understand how the concept of professionalism is used. In fact, L'Etang (2005) asserted that critical public relations should not be driven by any agenda including that of professionalisation. Instead, she felt that critical PR academics should not feel the need to justify their work in this way and that if so, it raises '*worrying questions about power in the public relations academy*' (L'Etang, 2005, p 523). .

Thus, some arguments highlight the importance of looking at the concept of professionalism from a critical perspective whilst others arguing for professionalism include that professions meet the societal need for expertise and credentialism - and that they are a steadying force in society, protecting values and defenceless people. But is public relations a craft or a profession? This is explored in the ensuing paragraphs.

Is Public Relations a Craft or a Profession?

The question of whether or not public relations is a craft or profession is sometimes open to debate, especially when the term PR itself draws ambiguity. Kim & Hon (1998) propounded that public relations can indeed be *either* a craft *or* a profession, depending on what model of public relations is practiced by the practitioner. The four models of public relations developed by Grunig and Hunt (1984) as highlighted already in this chapter, are:

- Press Agency
- Public Information
- Two-Way Asymmetrical
- Two-Way Symmetrical.

Professional PR is found in the two way models ranging across a spectrum from persuasion on the one end (two way asymmetrical) to conflict management (two-way symmetrical). However craft public relations is the term used for the first two models – namely press agency and public information:

Press Agency and Public Information are called *craft* public relations - meaning one way communication ranging from propaganda (press agency) to journalism (public information) on the other (Kim and Hon, 1998, pages 158-159).

Grunig (2000) noted that the most popular approach to determine the level of professionalisation is that known as the trait method. With this method, Grunig (ibid) noted that a list of theoretical characteristics are developed and applied to an occupation such as public relations to determine the extent to which it is professionalized. With the trait method in mind, Grunig and Hunt (1984) outlined five characteristics of a professional including:

- A set of professional values
- Membership of strong professional organisations
- Adherence to professional norms such as those provided by a code of ethics that can be used to enforce values
- An intellectual tradition and an established body of knowledge and
- Technical skills acquired through professional training.

(Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p 64)

In later years, Grunig (2000) wrote that he believes public relations is achieving professional status largely because of the development of a theoretical body of knowledge that has intellectualised the nature of strategic, symmetrical practice whilst also providing practical methods and strategies to implement the symmetrical ideal.

Similarly, the defining characteristics of the public relations profession as noted more recently by Pieczka & L'Etang (2006) are the troika of a '*body of knowledge, ethics and certification*' (p270). The criteria therefore for professionalism referred to in this paragraph find their justification in social research and scholarly inquiry, as noted by IPRA (1997) and Ehling (1992):

'There is a close association on the one hand between professionalism and a body of knowledge and the role of education in transmitting that body of knowledge on the other hand' (Ehling, 1992 p442).

Most of these professionalized occupations enjoy respect and autonomy which Grunig (2000) believes are key characteristics of a profession that public relations must develop and that eventually will allow public relations practitioners to realise the importance of serving the interests of all the publics of an organisation and not just that of the client.

As noted by IPRA (1997), public relations has emerged from publicity to decision-making and into an applied social science discipline. The IPRA (1997) further states:

Central to the development of public relations as both a profession and a serious academic discipline is the development of a body of theoretical knowledge that differentiates public relations from other occupations and academic areas (IPRA, 1997, p22).

Gregory (2012) also noted that there are growing numbers of academic conferences indicating a healthy interest in sometimes more specialist areas. For example, the International History of Public Relations Conference held in Bournemouth UK was established in 2009 (Theofilou and Watson, 2014) and the International Public Relations Conference in Barcelona - which was launched in 2011 – is now running annually.

Arguably, one of the main problems public relations continues to have in relation to professionalism is the connection of public relations programmes with journalism schools.

Journalism is seen as one-way communication – equated with press-agentry, (Grunig and Hunt 1984) where it simply involves the business of getting something into a newspaper, or online, or on onto a television or radio broadcast. Tench and Fawkes (2005) suggest that this could be one of the reasons why public relations may not be viewed as a profession and more-so as a craft. Therefore, the location of where PR courses are taught within HE in Ireland are looked at in the following table.

Table 4 - PR Courses in Ireland within Higher Education and what Schools/Faculties they are located in

Name of Higher Education Institution	Name of PR degree(s)	Faculty (or School)	Department
Institute of Technology Carlow (IT Carlow)	Media and Public Relations (BA hons)	Business and Humanities	Sport, Media and Marketing
Cork Institute of Technology	Higher Diploma in Arts in Public Relations (Postgraduate course) MA in Public Relations with New Media (taught)	Crawford College of Art and Design	Department of Media Communications
Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT)	MA in Public Relations (full-time, one year)	College of Arts and Design	School of Media (which is located within the College of Arts and Design in DIT)
Dundalk Institute of Technology	Currently developing a new programme in the area of Digital Marketing, Public Relations and Communication (Level 7 degree-with Level 8 add-on options)	Business and Humanities	Department of Management and Financial Studies
DCU (Dublin City University)	MSc in Public Relations and Strategic Communications	Humanities and Social Sciences	Communications

The above table highlights as stated not just a listing of the PR courses within HE in Ireland, but also the school or location of where these courses are taught. It's interesting to note the diversity of locations – e.g. the PR degree in Cork IT is located in the School of Art and Design as is the MA degree in PR from DIT. The location of where PR degrees are taught in higher education in Ireland, is important to highlight as course content may be affected as a result. For example, in the US, many PR degrees were taught in communication departments, linked to journalism and there is criticism that this has hampered its development as an academic subject (Wright 2011). Tench and Deflagbe (2008) wrote that PR in the UK took a different route with many PR degrees taught in business schools offering a strong focus on strategic management rather than media relations.

This location of PR education located within media schools is significant because locating PR courses within media and journalism schools is deemed to be a flawed model and the focus is too much on news media which continues to treat PR as one-way communication centred around publicity and media relations (Kalupa 2007; Wright 2011). This is not of course to say that media relations is not an important part of a PR curriculum. In fact, Macnamara (2014) noted that in studies over the past 100 years, there is an indication that 40-75% of media content is routinely sourced from, or influenced by PR. However this finding in the literature will be worth exploring when the views of senior practitioners on the occupation of public relations, are explored.

Separately, Pieczka & L'Etang (2006) suggest that the professionalism being called for can be received from a large volume of respectable published research. Public relations is relatively young as an academic field and has developed identifiable theory only in the last 50 years (Botan & Taylor, 2006).

The published record of developments in the field of public relations has been dominated by the American experience, primarily because the longest established academic journals in public relations to date – *Public Relations Review* and *Journal of Public Relations Research* are based in America and largely devoted to American research. In fact, Wright (2007) noted that there were no public relations scholarly journals until the arrival of Public Relations

Review in 1975. A full list of scholarly journals that focus on public relations are relayed in table the following table.

Table 5 - Public Relations Scholarly Journals

Public Relations Scholarly Journals	Year of First Volume
Public Relations Review	1975
Journal of Communication Management	1996
Corporate Communications: An International Journal	1996
Prism Online PR Journal	2003
International Journal of Strategic Communication	2006
Public Relations Journal	2006
Public Relations Inquiry	2012

Information sources: Wright (2007); Gregory (2012) and Ihlen and Verhoeven (2012)

This table highlights the range of academic journals located within the field of public relations. As noted by Ihlen and Verhoeven (2012), the rich array of academic journals, promises a richer and wider approach to the study and practice of public relations (p 160).

Many universities are now attempting to quantify the perceived value of academic research and are doing so by calculating the amount of citations that a journal receives. Wright (2014) criticises this methodology, especially the assumption that all citations are equal. Wright (ibid) noted: *'Faculty members frequently are granted or denied promotion and tenure based upon this measure of the impact of their research'* (p 5).

Be that as it may, Pasadeos, Berger and Renfro (2010) examined PR literatures' most cited works at the turn of the millennium and compared it to an investigation of literature completed ten years previously by Pasadeos, Renfro and Hanily (1999). They found that in the period from 2000-2005, a total of 14,798 citations were recorded which was 93% larger than the 1990-1995 total of 7,659 citations. Of course, this increase can be attributed to the increase in digital technology.

Nonetheless, in addition to this increase in citations, Pasadeos et al (2010) noted that new research and topics have emerged in areas such as international studies, technology, crisis

communication and gender studies. The literature continues to *'reflect a new and diverse group of published scholars with an increasing internationalisation of scholarship'* (Pasadeos, Berger and Renfro, 2010, p 151). Heath (2005) advocated that although there are challenges to the concepts of professionals and professionalism, professions still dominate our world.

Chapter Summary

To conclude, this chapter attempted to explain what public relations ‘is’ and conveyed that in establishing what public relations ‘is’ many have attempted to relay their different perspectives. The variance of PR perspectives that are covered by theorists in academia were looked at, as were terms that are used in public relations literature including the ‘Excellence Theory’, the ‘dominant coalition’, role typologies and whether or not PR is a craft or profession.

So far it is evident from the literature, that whilst different perspectives of public relations exist, the diverse nature of disagreements about how public relations is viewed without an overall agreement about its nomenclature, is not helping an industry that should be able to define its field in a more effective manner. As noted by Tench and Deflagbe (2008), issues of definition could have an impact on both the theory and practice and could also allow other fields to appropriate PR concepts and functions.

The next chapter looks at how the public relations field has developed, particularly in the context of key historical moments in the 20th century in Ireland.

Chapter Three

Public Relations and its Development in Ireland

This chapter highlights how the public relations field has developed in Ireland. A contemporary history of public relations education in Ireland is outlined and graphically illustrated. This graphic illustration highlights the history of public relations in the context of historical influences that have occurred in parallel with the development of formal PR education in Ireland.

Figure 1 displays a contemporary history of the development of public relations in Ireland since the beginning of the 20th century. It has been argued that the roots of public relations in Ireland date back to as early as the 5th century when Irish monks copied ancient books and then emigrated to set up monasteries throughout Europe (Carty, 2004). Nonetheless, the focus in this chapter is on modern day public relations. Not all key dates in history are included, but as L'Etang (2014) purported - it is important to acknowledge assumptions that have shaped the researcher's approach and decision to include such socio-cultural and political contexts.

I am conscious of the word *history* here and I concur with concerns noted by Hora (2012) who asserted that '*most histories of public relations or propaganda have been written either by public relations academics with little formal training as historians, or by historians with no formal training in public relations*' (p 11) creating as a consequence a difficulty in establishing a credible narrative. Hence, this chapter section should be read in the context of a *general overview* of public relations education Ireland, rather than a strict historical timeline. Having said that, all dates and events are, of course accurate.

This chapter is important because as noted by Cutlip (1994), practitioners who inevitably strive for professionalism, but who do not have a sense of the history of public relations, are limiting their understanding of the role and purpose of the occupation.

How the public relations field has developed in Ireland

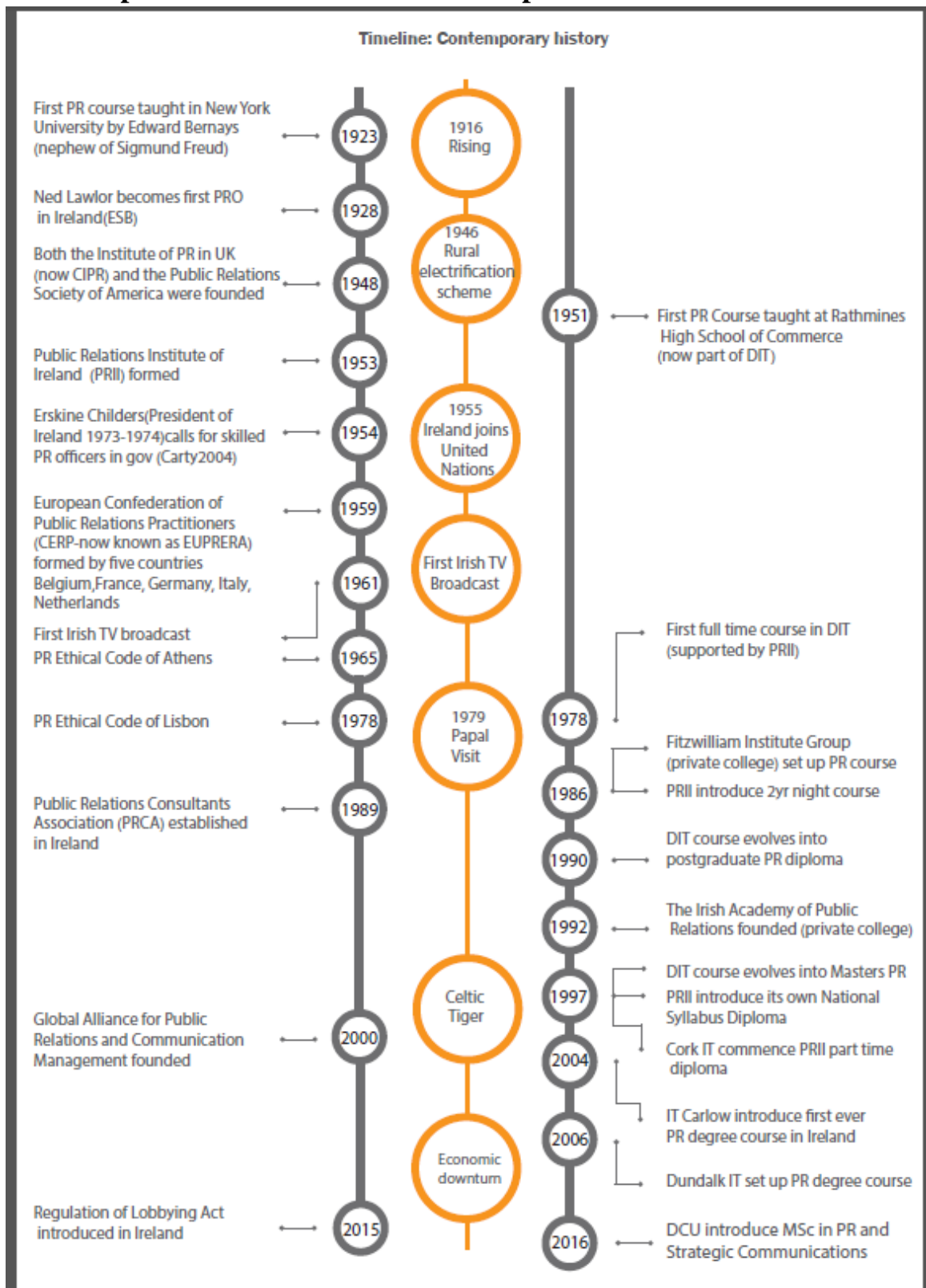


Figure 1 - Timeline of Contemporary History of Public Relations in Ireland

Figure 1 displays three data sets. The circles on the left data set illustrate some key developments in public relations in Ireland and internationally of relevance to the occupation of PR. In the central data set, the circles highlight key historical developments that occurred in Ireland that I believe have played their part in developing the PR practice. Finally, the third axis highlights the evolution of formal PR education in Ireland to date.

The graph illustrates that public relations as an occupation followed in essence from the military, economic and technological revolutions in Ireland, as the need for higher levels of skills in industry were required. The range of events and dates shown in this illustration all played a part in public relations history. For ease of reading, the explanation of the illustration on Figure 1, is broken down into three sections – left, centre and right data sets.

Significant Milestones that show the Development of Public Relations in Ireland and Internationally

The circles on the left data set of the illustration in figure 1 highlight key moments in PR practice both in Ireland and abroad. The first circle shows that in 1923, Edward L. Bernays (a nephew of Sigmund Freud) set up the first course at an American University called ‘Public Relations’. It was located within the department of Journalism at New York University, (Cutlip, 1994). Born in Vienna Austria in 1891, Edward Bernays worked for US President Woodrow Wilson during World War 1. Bernays was influenced by his uncle (Sigmund Freud) for many of his PR campaigns. He coined the term “counsel on public relations” and set up the first education course called ‘public relations’ in 1923. This was not however the first PR course – just the first one that used the term ‘public relations’. According to Hallahan (2013), the first course was taught in 1920 at the University of Illinois by Josef Wright who was the publicity director of the University. By 1951, twelve American universities had introduced education programmes in public relations and by 2012, approximately 300 colleges and universities in America offer at least one course dealing with public relations. Of these, approximately 200 offer a public relations sequence or degree programme (Seitel, 2011).

In Ireland, Ned Lawlor was appointed the first public relations officer in 1928. As noted by Carty (2004), Ned Lawlor played a major role in awareness campaigns, particularly in the rural electrification scheme which commenced from 1946. Records from Dáil (Parliament) debates also show a desire for more public relations personnel – for example, in October 1969, Dr O’ Connell T.D. (Member of Parliament) suggested to the then Minister for Local Government Mr Kevin Boland that a public relations officer should be employed in order to ensure up to date information was available in relation to housing:

He might consider the suggestion I made to him some time ago about appointing a public relations officer to Dublin Corporation for the purpose of providing this information. We might avoid the scare headlines about housing if he were to give correct information regularly to the public. (Dáil Debate, 1969).

Interestingly, the mention of public relations in Dáil debates was significant between 1940 and 1950 - before any formal public relations education, which commenced in 1951 at the Rathmines College of Commerce. Although this is not the core focus of this thesis, further research into achieving an understanding of what politicians understood of the term when they used it in the government would be significant in its contribution to Irish research. For example, Senator Ó Buachalla asks in the Irish language in 1946 if it isn’t time for the Department of Transport to appoint a public relations officer to communicate the operations of the public service and to answer any queries the public may have (Dáil Debate 1946). It would seem however that public relations was equated to publicity and public information at this time - in response to Senator Liam Ó Buachalla’s query, the then Minister for Posts and Telegraphs, Mr Little TD replied:

The Senator suggests that a public relations officer be appointed. I think that it will be time enough, when we have dealt with the arrears and the normal flow, to launch on a publicity campaign which would justify a public relations officer. (Dáil Debate, 1946).

In addition to calls from TDs in relation to appointing public relations personnel, Carty (2004) also wrote that the Public Relations Institute of Ireland (PRII) archives show evidence of early ambition for greater professionalism of public relations from as early as the 1950s, with Erskine Childers, former President of Ireland (from 1973-1974) calling in 1954 for more

public relations, saying there were no highly skilled public relations officers in a number of important government departments.

The formation of professional bodies can be seen as an important state in the natural history of a profession (L'Etang, 2001) and in Ireland, the Public Relations Institute of Ireland (PRII) was established in 1953 and the Public Relations Consultants Association (PRCA) was founded in later years in 1989. The PRII caters for individual membership and the PRCA provides for consultancies.

Practitioners and professional bodies in Ireland also enjoy collaborations with a number of international PR professional bodies including European Public Relations Education and Research Association (EUPRERA), the International Public Relations Association (IPRA) and the Global Alliance (GA) for Public Relations and Communication Management. Other professional bodies of interest globally to Irish PR practitioners include the Chartered Institute of Public Relations in the UK (CIPR UK) and the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA).

Practitioners and professional organisations have also ensured that the codes of ethics internationally recognised by the occupation, are adhered to. These include:

- The European Code of Professional Practice, adopted by the European Public Relations Confederation (CERP) in 1978 and commonly known as the Code of Lisbon.
- The International Code of Ethics, also known as the Code of Athens.
- The PRII Code of Practice for Public Affairs & Lobbying. (www.prii.ie)

The public relations industry is not formally regulated although many scholars and practitioners have suggested accreditation (official recognition of educational courses by the professional bodies) as one way to enhance the professionalism of public relations practice (Sha, 2011). The Commission on Public Relations Education (2006) recommended that more public relations programs seek accreditation and that more practitioners volunteer to serve on site, visiting teams for these important evaluations of academic excellence. All public relations courses in Ireland located within higher education are accredited by the PRII.

Key Moments in Irish History that have impacted on Public Relations

The central data set displays key moments in Irish history that have impacted on the occupation of public relations in Ireland. Figure 1 displays the Easter 1916 rising, a significant moment in Irish history when a military organisation known as the Irish Republican Brotherhood organised a rising to end British rule in Ireland and establish an independent Irish Republic. However, although the leaders had to surrender after six days, Foley (2016) noted that in media terms, the event was far from a failure:

If success in our media age can be judged by column inches and visibility then the Rising was a media success. For 14 days from April 25 to May 8th the New York Times alone devoted front-page news to Ireland and the Rising. As well as in New York, the events in Dublin were covered through the US as well as internationally. (Foley, 2016, p1).

Foley (1916) further points out that the stories about the Rising that appeared in the *Boston Globe*, the *Chicago Tribune* and *Le Petit Journal* appeared because the rebels wanted that to happen. As Carty (2004) said: '*these rebels under siege, sent their messages to the world*' (p 203). Walsh (2008) noted that the Irish revolution occurred during the heyday of mass circulation of newspapers owned by competitive press barons who invested hugely in promoting their titles. As Foley (2016) proffered: '*Modern public relations is one of the outcomes of the war*' (p 2). It can therefore be argued that the reporting of the Easter 1916 Rising played its part in the development of public relations in Ireland.

It has already been noted that Ned Lawlor, a Dublin journalist, was appointed the first ever public relations officer in Ireland in 1928, by the then Managing Director of the Electricity Supply Board (ESB). (Previous literature such as Carty (2004) has given the date as 1927 for this appointment, but in my research and subsequent verbal discussions with Carty, it was found that the correct date for Ned Lawlor's appointment was the 1st July 1928).

ESB commenced Ireland's rural electrification scheme in 1946 and its purpose was to rollout the benefits of electricity to every household and farm in the State. Electricity had already been supplied since the formation of the ESB to 240,000 towns and cities following Ireland's

hydro-electric *Shannon Scheme*, but 400,000 houses in rural Ireland were still without power, until the setting up of this rural electrification scheme in 1946, following World War 2 (ESB Archives, 2016). The Public Relations office was kept busy during this time as when the ESB engineers had finished installing electricity in each town and village, an official *switching on* ceremony was organised where speeches were made and local leaders in attendance, most notably, the local clergy, county councillors and one or two senior representatives of ESB were keynote speakers:

Speeches were made...the historic importance of the occasion was noted and hopes were expressed that the coming of the light was symbolic of the dawn of a new era of enlightenment and prosperity for the community. Almost invariably the opening verses of the Gospel of St John were quoted ‘...*and the light shineth in the darkness and the darkness hath not overcome it ...*’. A blessing was frequently made by the clergy of the different denominations, and the guest of honour was then invited to press the switch. Switch on was usually followed by a celebratory evening of entertainment, organised by the local committee and the crew as guests of honour. (ESB Archives, 2016).

Thus, not only was the role of the Catholic Church in Ireland – a well documented part of Ireland’s history – but equally the role of public relations in the development of electricity throughout Ireland marked a key part of Ireland’s industrial and economic development.

Separately, the first ever teachers’ strike in 1946 conveys a typical example of how information campaigns and publicity were a key part of the evolution of public relations during this era. A committee known as the *Central Propaganda Committee* was set up by the Irish National Teachers’ Organisation (INTO) where McCormack (1996) noted:

A series of special meetings were organised in pursuance of the scholarly claim. Widespread publicity surrounding the meetings resulted in support for many different sections of the community. (McCormack, 1996 p 17).

Interestingly, the importance of the dominance of the Catholic Church was evident again at this time, as the teachers’ strike was finally only called off after seven months following an appeal from the then Archbishop of Dublin, Most Rev. Dr John Charles McQuaid.

Separately, Ireland joining the United Nations in 1955 indicated an important milestone for public relations in Ireland. In a (previously unpublished) speech to the Public Relations Institute of Ireland on 23rd March 1956, the then Minister for External Affairs, Mr Liam Cosgrave TD said:

In the world of today, public relations are as necessary for countries as are commercial firms...the role of public relations for Ireland in the international sphere today, particularly in light of our recent admission to the United Nations by which we have been able to play again our full part in world affairs. (Cosgrave, 1956).

Interestingly, the Minister goes on to say in his speech that his department's work in the field of public relations is not carried out by professional experts, rather they are civil servants with no specialised training in public relations. Although Cosgrave acknowledges that there are arguments on both sides, he argued that as a small service, the present system was best. This is no longer the case within government departments.

Another key development in Ireland's history was the arrival of television. Although television was present in approximately 4,000 homes in Ireland in the 1950s (Brennan, 2016), 1961 saw the advent of the first television transmission by an Irish broadcaster, namely RTE. 1965 was the first election campaign to receive TV coverage and in 1973 Jack Lynch became the first Taoiseach (Prime Minister) to concede defeat live on television bringing 16 years of Fianna Fáil rule to an end (Ó Brien and Ó Beacháin, 2014). Carty (2004) wrote that the advent of television represented a major cultural change in a country where up until this time, no debates with politicians or church leaders were visually seen and where 95 percent of the population were Roman Catholics. Sheehan (1987) noted that the first broadcast on New Year's Eve was surrounded by great festivity and excitement:

Beginning with the national anthem, the night's programming included music, poetry, news, benediction and ceremonial speeches....Éamon de Valera, now the president and the personification of the older post-independent Ireland, struck a cautionary note. Television, he said, was like atomic energy: it could be used either for good or bad. It could either impart knowledge and build the character of a whole people or it could lead 'through demoralisation to decadence and dissolution'. (Sheehan, 2004 p 32).

Separately, one more key historical date highlighted in the illustration was the visit by the Pope to Ireland in 1979. Over 3,000 media were in attendance for the Papal Visit in 1979 and the professional body in Ireland - the PRII - volunteered their services to the hierarchy for this visit and over 100 of their members worked on media and event organisation, (Carty, 2004). The Irish Times (1999) reported that the high standards of media handling drew an accolade from Reuters, which declared that this was the best organised media event it had ever covered. Additionally, Colley (1993) noted:

The satisfaction lay in having provided a media service which received many favourable comments in the following days and weeks from media everywhere, for what had been the largest such event ever handled in Ireland (Colley, 1993, p 94).

Separately, the Celtic Tiger years, a term referring to the growth of the economy in Ireland from the mid-1990s to mid-2000s, were a time when Ireland had the third highest gross domestic product (GDP) per head of the population in the EU at 118 percent of the average, behind Denmark (120%) and Luxembourg (192%) (Carty 2004). Dorgan (2006) acclaimed that from 1990 to 2005, employment in Ireland soared from 1.1 million to 1.9 million, meaning more growth, more jobs and rising living standards. From a public relations perspective growth was evident at this time with an increase in membership of Ireland's professional public relations body, the PRII which went from 165 members in 1995 to more than 300 in 2003 (Carty 2004). Membership of the Public Relations Institute of Ireland (PRII) now stands at approximately one thousand (PRII 2016).

Much has been written about the economic downturn and the focus of this thesis is not on this topic. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note the comments by the public relations industry during the economic crisis – caused by a number of factors, including the 2008/9 financial crisis and the international recession, a near banking collapse and a property bubble (Turley and Flannery 2013) resulting in a sovereign debt crisis (one of many in the eurozone) and Ireland's bailout by the International Monetary Fund/EU in late 2010.

However the then Chairperson of the Public Relations Consultants Association (PRCA) emphasised the importance of public relations in times of economic downturn more than ever when she said:

The public relations consultancy industry continues to face huge challenges during the current economic downturn and 2010 is proving a tough year for our members. However, the need for planned, effective communication from Government down has never been greater and public relations consultants are still the best equipped to deliver core messages. (O'Sullivan, 2010).

Thus, some key moments in Irish history during the 20th and 21st century that had an impact on public relations have been highlighted in this section. The next section looks at the development of public relations education in Ireland.

Development of Public Relations Education in Ireland

The circles on the right data set of the illustration in figure 1 highlight the development of public relations education in Ireland. It's important to emphasise that the next chapter will examine the relationship between public relations and higher education. This section specifically focuses on the key dates in the development of public relations education in the context of developments in Irish history.

The illustration shows that public relations education emerged in Ireland from the 1950s when the first PR course was taught in Rathmines High School of Commerce in 1951. A copy of the syllabus for this course can be seen in appendix seven. (This is the first time that this artefact has been published. This was retrieved from a private collector who had copied and retrieved a lot of public relations documentation when it was brought to his attention some years ago that files were to be destroyed). The course involved a series of lecture discussions over ten weeks commencing on 11 January 1951 and the titles of the lectures included:

- The purpose and practice of public relations.
- Determination of policy.
- Public relations and information.
- Methods of approach.

- Labour relations.
- House publications.
- Public relations organisation.
- Formulation of campaigns. (VEC, 1951).

The contents of this syllabus will be examined again in the next chapter when discussing curricula within public relations education.

Interestingly, there were no other PR courses in Ireland until 1978 when the first full time course in Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) was set up, with support from the PRII. In perusing the syllabus for this course, it would seem that public relations education was equated primarily with media relations as the content covers:

- What is PR?
- Being interviewed: Appearing on television
- Editing a house journal
- What is the media? (PRII, 1978).

In 1986, the Fitzwilliam Institute group, a privately owned college, set up a PR course and the PRII set up a two year night-time certificate PR course. PR education began to grow significantly in the 1990s with the DIT evolving into a post graduate PR diploma course and subsequently into an MA course in 1997. Another private college, the Irish Academy of Public Relations, founded their PR course in 1992. This college now runs only online courses. Cork IT commenced a PRII part-time diploma course in 1997 and Dundalk IT set up their undergraduate PR degree course in 2006.

The Institute of Technology Carlow, set up the first ever undergraduate degree course in public relations in Ireland in 2004. However, it was a two years prior to that (2002), that the initial suggestions were made by retired and existing colleagues to introduce a public relations degree in IT Carlow. Mr John Scott, the then chairperson of a public relations and communications committee and his colleagues Maebh Maher, Declan Doyle, Bernadette Scott, Kathleen O'Keeffe and Veronica Kelly, prepared the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) submission document.

HETAC was the awarding authority for higher education courses in Ireland, (it is now known as the QQI) and in the submission document it was noted that:

- A Degree would attract more students of a higher academic standard.
- A specialised course would provide the opportunity to ensure that graduates have the depth of academic learning necessary for them to attain a degree and to operate in middle management.
- Students attracted to the course want to obtain a degree.
- The current lack of recognition of Diplomas and Certificates can be a handicap to graduates seeking employment abroad. Academic recognition is accorded to a Degree transnationally.

(Institute of Technology Carlow submission document to HETAC, 2002)

The rationale for inclusion of public relations was mainly due to growth in the marketplace (Minutes of meetings, IT Carlow, 2002). However, in addition, the public relations part was really an addendum to communications, which was at the time a module on all subjects in the business school and an area of expertise with one of my (now former) colleagues, namely John Scott (RIP) who had written scholarly publications specifically on the subject. A TV studio had been built in the college, specifically to be utilised under the *communications* umbrella, however, the TV Studio was underutilised. Given that public relations skills involve media training and presentation skills, it was felt that public relations should be included with communications. Additionally, in a survey completed for the submission document to the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) for approval for the course to be set up, three conclusions support the proposed *BA in Public Relations & Communications*.

1. The vast majority of the Guidance Counsellors indicate that their students are interested in a degree level qualification.
2. The number of students applying for courses similar to the proposed course is increasing.
3. It was the view of the Guidance Counsellors that the significant element of TV Studio work involved in the course would be “*very attractive*” to students.

(IT Carlow submission document to HETAC, 2002)

Thus, although the growth of public relations education within higher education in Ireland can be attributed to the significant growth in HE in general in the last two decades, it is

interesting to note here that one of the main reasons for its introduction in IT Carlow was meeting potential students' interest in degree qualification along with exploiting the under-utilised TV studio.

The interest in PR education from an international perspective rose particularly with the publication of *The Professional Bond – Public Relations Education and the Practice* (2006) - a report on undergraduate and graduate education in the United States. In this study, the Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE) stated that 'public relations education must be interdisciplinary and broad, particularly in liberal arts and sciences' (p 43). Specific points made in this report in relation to the knowledge, skills and attributes recommended for entry level graduates from PR higher education courses, are expanded on in the next chapter.

In relation to the UK, L'Etang (2003) proffered that public relations research dates back to the early 1920s when articles were published in the specialised *Public Administration Journal* focusing on internal and external communications, the gathering of intelligence for senior management, information and publicity and a range of techniques including media relations, exhibitions and publications (p 54).

Jackson (2009) reported that public relations education in the United Kingdom began with the development of the Institute of Public Relations (IPR) in 1948. Additionally, Anthony (2012) noted that 1951 was the year in the UK when its professional body, the IPR began to make a significant economic impact when campaigns such as the *Keep Britain Tidy* campaign and the logo designed by Abram Games for this campaign, began to stimulate a range of public relations activity (Anthony, 2012, p 180).

The IPR subsequently created a two-part diploma at the Regent Street Polytechnic, London, in 1956, with courses being taught by established practitioners. By the 1970s, the IPR offered an IPR certificate, the Higher National Certificate in Business Studies, and a diploma in public relations. Dr Danny Moss of Manchester Metropolitan University set up the first formal PR qualification, a masters degree, at Stirling University in 1987 (Howard, 2015). According to Jackson (2009), there are more than 50 schools in the United Kingdom offering

courses in public relations. Of these schools, more than 20 offer a public relations program approved by the Chartered Institute of Public Relations.

Although Ireland and the UK are members of Europe, in *mainland* Europe, Van Ruler and Verčič (2004) researched PR education across all countries and noted that most PR courses developed significantly in the late 1970s and 1980s, further emphasising how young an academic discipline it is. Van Ruler and Verčič (2004) reported that the term *public relations* is not a very widely used name for the field in Europe, neither in practice nor in science. Bentele (2004) cited one of the reasons for the differences between public relations in Europe and the US (and I believe in the UK and Ireland) is that not all European approaches are available in the English language. Another reason for the difference in the naming of the field in Europe in comparison to UK, US and Ireland, is that in the former, the field focuses on public as *publics*, while in some European countries, the roots of it science and practice are based on public as *public sphere* developed by Jürgen Habermas which included a critical discussion on public relations and advertising (Bentele, 2004).

In Australia, although the first third level degree in public relations is attributed to the Mitchell College of Advanced Education in 1971, Fitch (2014) notes that PR as a course of study developed significantly in the late 1980s. Conversely however, Gleeson (2013) insists there is '*clear evidence*' (p 194) that the momentum and early achievements in Australian PR education occurred prior to developments in Brisbane and Bathurst in 1970, and instead commenced in Melbourne in the 1950s through the Victorian chapter of the Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA).

Space in this thesis prevents a more detailed breakdown of when the occupation and education of public relations commenced across the globe. I have formulated a table which can be seen in appendix six, from Ruler and Vercic (2004) summarising when PR education commenced in each European country. Although this is based on preliminary readings for this research, it does offer useful signposting to variations and resemblances in the development of public relations across different countries. The next section in this chapter will look at the contemporary character of public relations in Ireland.

The Contemporary Character of Public Relations in Ireland

In this section I take a brief look at where public relations is now in Ireland from an educational and an occupational perspective. Firstly, from an educational perspective, there is clear evidence of the growth and development of public relations courses in Ireland, particularly in the last twenty years, whereby the MA courses in DIT and Cork IT and the undergraduate courses located in IT Carlow, Cork IT and Dundalk IT are all popularly subscribed in terms of entrants. Employment in the occupation from these courses is high and although there is no formal tracking available, some research completed by the PRII (2014) shows that on average 75% of those completing PR education are working in a PR or related setting immediately after graduation. It's important to state however that this percentage was not based on all PR courses within HE.

However, although public relations can already be seen as a scientific discipline with specialised journals and professional associations, (Botan & Taylor 2004), Ireland has not reached comparable levels of professionalism as in other countries such as the UK, US or many countries in Europe such as Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands and Austria. Whilst Edwards (2016) is calling on academic scholars internationally to publish more research in journals from fields outside of public relations - such as political communication, media studies, ethics and racial studies, gender studies and organisational communication) - public relations research in Ireland is in its infancy.

However, academic writings have been published by Irish academics such as Dr. Francis Xavier Carty, Dr. Kevin Hora, Dr. Conor McGrath, Dr. Ian Somerville, Dr Laoise Ó Murchú and Dr. Andy Purcell. Additionally, one of the core textbooks on most undergraduate public relations courses is an Irish book by Ellen Gunning (2007), although one of the core text books used is that by UK authors, Tench and Yeomans (2009) called *Exploring Public Relations*.

Dissertations being produced from Masters courses in Ireland are also producing a body of knowledge which should contribute to practice in years to come, (Carty 2004). Nevertheless, there is a need for broader research – particularly articles in peer reviewed academic journals that would contribute to further development of the profession.

Secondly, from the perspective of practice, there is increasing evidence to show that the number of public relations appointments continue to grow. In relation to Ireland, the most recent figures by PRII (2015) show that:

- *Recruitment in 2015 was up 82% since 2014*
- *Significant increase in recruitment activity by agency and in-house employers at all levels – executive level recruitment up 58%, manager level up 70% and director level up 475%*
- *Major increase in recruitment at director level signals confidence in employers (agency and in-house) in planning public relations activity for the medium to long-term*

(Source: PRII, 2015, p 1).

It is estimated that the PR industry in Ireland was worth in the order of €60m in 2013 (PRII, 2015). This figure only relates to the consultancy sector - it doesn't cover the in-house cohort for which figures were not available. In terms of the number of agencies within that marketplace, the PRII estimate that there are approximately ninety agencies operating across the country but of those only in the order of 20 would have more than two or three employees. It is estimated that the 31 PR Consultancies that are members of the Public Relations Consultancy Association in Ireland represent 80% of the overall market, (World PR Report, 2015).

Additionally, from an occupational perspective, educators and practitioners alike agree that social media is changing the PR industry and changes in the world from a technological perspective have impacted on how PR professionals communicate with relevant publics. The impact of a growing number of media channels, increasing competition between channels and the technological developments of digital media are resulting in turning our societies into information and communication societies (Bentele, 2004, p 486). Kim and Johnson (2009) asserted that advances in communications technologies are one of the most significant changes in the PR industry whilst Heath (1998) wrote about the power shift as a result of the

internet where neither media nor government officials have the final power in determining whether issues' discussants can have their voices heard. In fact, Kim and Johnson (2009) highlighted that PR practitioners welcome the potential of new media as technological advances enable them to communicate directly with their audiences. Similarly, Alexander (2004) and Hurme (2001) asserted that the emergence of new technologies has meant that PR practitioners can increasingly engage in two-way symmetrical communication now.

Allagui and Breslow (2016) suggest that social media is becoming the preferred channel of engagement with all publics. Interestingly, in relation to social media, the importance of practitioners being able to work with *big data* has been emphasised in a recent report (European Communications Monitor 2016) and by Weiner and Kochar (2016). The European Communications Monitor report completed by Zerfass et al (2016) showed that although 72% believe big data will change the PR profession, just 23% have implemented activities resulting from big data analytics. This term *big data* only entered the Oxford English dictionary in 2013 and can be defined as:

Big data is extremely large data sets that may analysed computationally to reveal patterns, trends and associations, especially relating to human behaviour and interaction' (Oxford Dictionary)

However, it is worth keeping in mind the comments from Carty (2004) who asserted that:

Information flows so rapidly that there is frenetic activity and a fear that this will lead to an even great emphasis on short-term tactics and techniques rather than strategies. (Carty, 2004 p 213).

Thus, creating and maintaining a relevant curriculum for an occupation that continues to evolve as rapidly as is required by the digital revolution, is a challenging and continuous task. This will be examined in more detail in the next chapter. To summarise this section however, it is clear that the contemporary nature of the occupation of public relations in Ireland could be summarised as continuing to experience remarkable growth and change.

Chapter Summary

This chapter examined literature in relation to how public relations evolved in Ireland, expanding on a graphic illustration which covered key events in practice and in education. As noted by Hizal, Özdemir, & Ymanoğlu (2014), the meaning and role of public relations may take distinct forms in different temporal and spatial contexts and it was clear from the literature examined - for example from the comments made in the Dáil (Parliament) - that public relations has taken different paths in Ireland due its local social, political and economic contexts.

It would seem that the evolution of public relations as an occupation in Ireland was similar to that of most other countries in that it developed considerably in the post-war era. However, what seems unique to Ireland is the considerable *political* influences that played their part in the formulation of the occupation with the importance of public relations stressed by many politicians in Dáil Éireann (Irish Parliament) as highlighted in this chapter.

The literature to date shows that although public relations is both a professional practice with its own research and theory base, much needs to be done in relation to research and theory in Ireland. Thus, from the historical trajectory outlined in this and the previous chapter, the occupation of public relations in Ireland shows characteristics of both traits of being a profession and a craft insofar as it has professional bodies and trade bodies, aspects of education in universities, a body of knowledge and codes of ethics and practice. On the other hand, PR is similar to a craft as there are no starting points for entry meaning anyone can position themselves as a public relations practitioner.

The next and final chapter reviewing relevant literature will further explore the relationships between public relations and higher education in Ireland.

Chapter Four

Public Relations Education and Employability

This chapter begins by investigating the relationships between public relations and higher education by probing four different areas:

- i) Public Relations Education (PRE) having little or no connection with higher education (HE).*
- ii) Growth of graduates as entrants.*
- iii) Continual Professional Development (CPD) – the requirements (or not) of CPD for PR practitioners*
- iv) Development of specific PR undergraduate courses*

The literature on PR curricula, skills, knowledge, graduate attributes and the role of higher education - and specifically the role of public relations within HE - will be discussed in relation to relevant arguments and debates.

Most pertinently, this chapter explores whether or not the role of higher education in Ireland is to create employable graduates.

Public Relations Education (PRE) having little or no connection with Higher Education (HE)

Two bodies in Ireland, one State funded, known as the Vocational Educational College (VEC), and the public relations professional body known as the Public Relations Institute of Ireland (PRII) were both involved with public relations education from 1951. This was before HE's involvement in 1978 when the first full time course started at DIT.

Initially, as was highlighted in the previous chapter, the first formal public relations education course was in the College of Commerce, Rathmines, Dublin in 1951. Although this location was a *college* the PR education at this College of Commerce, Rathmines, was held under the auspices of the *City of Dublin Vocational Educational Committee*. Vocational Educational Committees existed from 1930-2013 when they were dissolved by the government and

replaced with Education and Training Boards (ETBs). The role of the VEC was to work in the area of continuing and technical education (O’Sullivan, 2015).

Subsequently, Carty (2004) noted that the Rathmines College held a longer course in 1954 in conjunction with the PRII. An article from the then PRII newsletter recorded that a total of 114 students enrolled on the course - but only 76 took the examination out of which just 50 passed, (PRII 1956). Therefore this course would not have had any involvement with higher education during this time. Thus, formal public relations education in Ireland was minimal until the first full-time course started in 1978 at the Dublin Institute of Technology with the support of the PRII (Carty, 2004).

Growth of Graduates as Entrants

It seems that practitioners working in the area of public relations before formal education was in place came from journalistic backgrounds. For example, it has already been noted that Mr Ned Lawlor was a journalist before being appointed the first ever public relations officer in 1928 in the ESB. Similarly, Tim Dennehy, referred to as one of the *‘Pioneers of Public Relations in Ireland’* (Irish Times, 1999), joined Ireland’s national public transport provider, Córas Iompair Éireann (CIE) in 1959 as its first head of publicity and public relations, after he had been employed as a journalist with a number of media outlets including RTE, the Irish Independent and the Irish Press. Likewise, Carty (2016) noted that the main lecturer on the initial ten week evening course in Rathmines College in 1951 was Edward F MacSweeney, publicity manager for Irish Cinemas Ltd who had previous experience in radio broadcasting.

Within the civil service, Dáil (Parliament) archive records indicate that there were two public relations officers employed in government in October 1958. Again, these two PR officers had journalistic backgrounds. The evidence of this can be seen on table 6 which appeared on an official report on Dáil questions and answers in that year.

Table 6 - Report on the Number, Status, Salary and Experience of Public Relations Officers in Government in 1958

Department	Number of Public Relations Officers	Date of Appointment	Status of Officer	Salary	Journalistic Experience
Posts and Telegraphs	1	7-9-1957	Permanent and Pensionable	£1,613-£1,807 inclusive	Frequent duty in News Department, Radio Éireann 1935-1945. Served in government Information Bureau 1948-1957
Agriculture	1	16-2-1956	Permanent and pensionable	£952-£1,281 inclusive	On staff of an Irish daily newspaper 1931-1951. Reporter in Radio Éireann 1951-1956

(Source: Dáil Éireann Debate, 1958).

The details above appeared on records from a question and answer session in the Dáil in 1958 as a result of politician Mr Byrne asking the then Parliamentary Secretary for Finance (now known as Minister of State) what the status was on the number of press officers that were employed within government offices. The PRO for Posts and Telegraphs had previous experience as a journalist in Radio Éireann (now known as RTE) and the PRO for the department of Agriculture was a staff member of an Irish newspaper and also a reporter with Radio Éireann. Thus, although their educational backgrounds are not detailed, it is clear that they had both worked in journalism before entering public relations.

Continual Professional Development (CPD) – The Requirements (or not) of CPD for PR Practitioners

Although it has been already outlined how public relations (PR) practice and education have grown and changed prodigiously both in Ireland and internationally, the occupation has no barrier to entry and requires no formal qualifications or continual professional development (CPD). However, CPD played an important part of PR education from as early as the 1950s when the first education course in public relations was introduced in Dublin to train existing workers who wished to understand the nature of the public relations occupation (VEC 1951). This is particularly interesting as it means that continual professional development (CPD) played an important part of formal public relations education before any involvement with professional bodies or with higher education. The relevance of the first syllabus to CPD can be seen in the course description where it is highlighted:

This course should be of interest to personnel engaged in Public Relations activities respecting State, Local Authority and Public Utility Services; Manufacturing, Extractive, Constructive and Commercial occupations; Advertising, Entertainment, Catering and the Tourist Industry; also to Employer and Employee Associations and Trade Unions and Social Service Organisations' (VEC, 1951).

Carty (2004) reported that the PRII turned its attention to continuing professional development (CPD) in 2002, describing it as a '*flexible framework within which companies and individuals can plan and recognise professional development and learning*' (Carty, 2004, p 211). Interestingly, the PRII (2014) maintained that the PRII had intended to, but never initiated a tracking and maintenance of a training log which was intended to follow the CPD programme. Thus, the intended migration to a programme of related points accumulation and logging did not materialise. This is unfortunate as a learning log in which staff record the skills they have learning is widely as seen as a useful device, as is appraising managers on the success they have enjoyed in developing their staff (Gray, 2000).

The PRII also run an annual conference and a number of annual evening and lunchtime discussions on a range of topical issues. These can help increase practitioners awareness and knowledge of up to date trends in the occupation and could merit inclusion for credits on a

CPD programme if the PRC introduce such a system in the future. Appleby (2015) maintained that a positive culture of continuous education and professional development is happening as a result of social media because of the PR practitioner's ability to listen, engage and measure which are now all dependant on newly emerging strategies, tactics and tools.

Development of Specific PR Undergraduate Courses

Whilst the Rathmines College of Commerce ran its courses in conjunction with the PRII, it was not until 1978 that the first full-time course started at the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) with the support of the PRII (Carty, 2004). This became a postgraduate diploma in 1990 and an MA degree in 1997. It is important to point out though that the transition from ‘non-HE’ courses to ‘HE/PR’ education was not linear. For example, although DIT had a PR course from 1978 where graduates received a HE certificate, there were also courses run directly from the PRII until 1996, when, following a review, the PRII introduced its own National Syllabus in 1997 (PRII Review, 2014).

By the mid-1980s, media were beginning to expand news pages thereby increasing the amount of opportunities for public relations practitioners. For example, both the *Irish Times* and the *Irish Independent* had moved beyond having a business page to publishing weekly business supplements whilst 1989 witnessed the arrival of a dedicated business newspaper – *the Sunday Business Post*, (Fahy, O’Brien and Poti 2010). Therefore, as media channels to consumers multiplied, the demand for public relations education began to grow. The previous chapter has already outlined how PR education began to grow significantly in the 1990s with the DIT evolving into a post graduate PR diploma course and subsequently into an MA course in 1997. Cork IT commenced a PRII part-time diploma course in 1997 and Dundalk IT set up their PR degree course in 2006. The Institute of Technology Carlow, commenced its degree course in public relations in Ireland in 2004.

The growth of public relations courses in higher education can, in addition to the evolution of the media marketplace as outlined above, be also attributed to the growth in the numbers entering higher education in general during this time. Higher education in Ireland is provided by 7 universities, 14 Institutes of Technology and 7 colleges of education.

The Department of Education and Skills in Ireland report that the numbers entering higher education each year have grown from 15,000 in 1980 to 42,000 in 2013. The latest available projections suggest that by 2028 the number of new entrants to higher education will increase by 29 per cent over 2013 levels. (Cassells 2015).

It is therefore axiomatic that provision of higher education both internationally and locally is expected to rise exponentially in the coming years. In fact, at a governmental meeting of the Joint Oireachtas Committee, Mr Tom Boland, CEO of the Higher Education Authority (HEA) said:

We urgently need to address the unavoidable connections between the funding of higher education research, the number of graduates and the quality of graduates and research outcomes, and the health of the society and economy. (Boland, 2015).

However, at a meeting of the Royal Irish Academy (RIA), Boland (2015) proffered a broader financially damning context to this growth:

Over the period 2007/08 to 2014/15:

- *There has been a fall in state grants for higher education of 38%.*
- *Overall funding for higher education has fallen by at least 13.5%.*
- *The overall number of full-time students has increased by 25%.*
- *This has all resulted in an overall decrease in the total funding per student of 22% - €11000 to €9000.*

At the same time the numbers employed in higher education institutions fell by 13% in 2000. In real terms the situation is worse because if we had maintained staffing ratios as they were at the beginning of the crisis we have effectively taken 4,000 staff out of the system. (Boland, 2016).

The above quote gives evidence of the dramatic reduction in state funding over the past decade, whilst staff numbers have fallen, but student numbers have risen. In my own institution, the growth is exponential. From 2010 to 2015, there has been an increase of 41% in total enrolment at the Institute of Technology where I teach and a 28% increase in full-time enrolment and a 69% increase in lifelong learning students. (Mulcahy, 2016).

The significant growth in student numbers in HE and also in public relations education within higher education, has translated into significant challenges at policy and at a structural level in Ireland. Firstly in relation to policy development, the most recent developments in HE in Ireland have emanated primarily from the Hunt Report (Hunt 2011). The Hunt Report chaired by Dr Colin Hunt, examined the higher education sector in Ireland providing '*a considered*

and informed basis for Government policy on the development of higher education in Ireland over the coming decades’, (Hunt, p 2, 2011). Secondly, structural factors such as an increase in class sizes, the location of HE buildings in rural areas and computer laboratory availability, can restrict active learning (Coombs and Rybacki 1999). A particular challenge for the IOT that I work in is its physical location as a lot of PR companies are based in Dublin hampering provision of guest lectures from practitioners. The increase in class sizes which has resulted in the growth of HE in Ireland is also a determinant of the extent to which active learning can be employed.

Thus, the impact of policy and structural factors are challenges within not just the higher education system in Ireland - but more specifically in relation to this thesis - to public relations education within higher education. However, the main question of relevance here is whether or not the role of higher education is to create “employable” students. This issue is addressed in the next paragraph.

Employability – Is the Role of Higher Education in Ireland to create ‘Employable’ Graduates’?

The extent to which the role of higher education is to create employable graduates is critically looked at in this section. The reason the term ‘employability’ needs to be examined is because my overall question looks at practitioner perspectives on the role of higher education as a preparation for employment in public relations.

The old traditional model of university being referred to as an *Ivory Tower* has progressively changed. In 1851, Cardinal John Henry Newman wrote in his series of papers on *the Idea of a University* that the power of a university education was to develop the individual. The same year as this work was published, he opened the Catholic University in Dublin (now known as University College Dublin), as a template for this new kind of institution where students did not just learn but flourished (Humphreys, 2014). As Cardinal John Newman (1907) said:

A University is, according to the usual designation, an Alma Mater, knowing her children one by one, not a foundry, or a mint, or a treadmill. (Newman, 1907, p 145).

Newman’s concept can still remind us that the role of higher education is not just to certify students with qualifications, but that it is also about shaping the individual. More recently, according to a consultation report (Cassells 2015) completed for the department of Education and Skills in Ireland, the purpose and value of higher education is:

The purpose and value of higher education is its ability to add to the understanding of, and hence the flourishing of, an integrated social, institutional, cultural and economic life. It contributes both to individual fulfilment and the collective good. (Cassells 2015, p iii).

Additionally, research completed by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) in 2015 into tertiary education, reported that over 80% of tertiary educated adults are employed, compared with over 70% with upper secondary or post-secondary education (OECD 2015). This report also highlighted that tertiary educated adults earn about 60% on average more than adults with upper secondary as their highest level of education attainment. (OECD 2015). Ireland known legendarily as the “land of saints and scholars” seems to continue to be recognised globally as is perhaps the role that higher

education and research has played in bringing about such successes as 9 out of the top 10 global software companies and 9 out of the top 10 pharmaceuticals companies are located in Ireland.

In the most recent higher education report in relation to HE and employability in Ireland, the HEA (2016) shows that only 5% of Honours Bachelor Degree graduates are 'seeking employment'. The report which looked at where graduates from 2014 progressed to, showed that almost six in ten Honours Bachelor Degree graduates found employment in 2014 (compared to 51% in 2013), the majority of whom are staying in Ireland (48%) for work. Likewise, employment grew for Higher and Postgraduate Diploma graduates – from 73% in 2013 to 76% in 2014. As a consequence, the proportion of such graduates going overseas has reduced (from 10% in 2013 to 8% in 2014). Masters and Doctorate graduates also experience relatively high levels of employment, at 78% – an improvement of five percentage points on the previous year. Therefore, there is clear evidence of a direct link between higher education and employability. However, the HEA (2016) additionally caution that given the decline in resources per student, *'we have to be alert to the risk that the quality of graduates too could decline, and so their employability'* (HEA, 2016, p3).

There is however growing concern amongst a number of academics in Higher Education in relation to the continuing growth in the number of students and the quality of higher education. Giroux (2010) and Ingleby (2015) have noted the shift in the HE landscape under neoliberal forces increasingly aligning the goals of business, government and education. Additionally, Boden and Nedava (2010) reason that higher education institutions are now generally managerialist, focusing on areas such as funding streams, performance management regimes, quality audits and research assessment exercises. One of their key points is significant in asserting this concern:

Educating students is now, to a significant extent, a mass, global corporatized business, exhibiting almost all of the characteristics associated with making cars or providing financial services. (Boden & Nedava, 2009, p 40).

A recent QQI (Quality Qualifications Ireland) report highlighted the effect of diminishing resources on a range of areas within HE in Ireland. These included the student's learning

experience, work overload, teaching and research, equipment and library facilities. However, as an insider who has experienced all these issues at the coalface, it seemed rather galling to read:

What is commendable and important to draw from many of the reports sampled is the continued emphasis by institutions on enhancing the student learning experience and the continued commitment of staff to rationalise, innovate and minimise the impact of reduced resources on students. (QZI, 2016).

But I would concur with Giroux (2010) who exhorted:

Overworked and politically underrepresented, an increasing number of higher education faculty are reduced to part time positions, constituting the new subaltern class of academic labour (Giroux 2010, p 191).

Therefore, examination of the role of HE needs to be done so critically. Boden and Nedava (2010) argued that the shift towards employability being a performative function of universities adjusts the power balances in favour of employee markets. It is argued however that this employability discourse may be adversely affecting teaching and learning to the detriment of students, institutions, employers, social justice and civil society (Boden and Nedava, 2010, p 37).

Be that as it may, Hill, Walkington and France (2016) suggest that it needs to be considered how '*generic graduate capabilities*' (p 155) enhance the disciplinary expertise of undergraduate students. It will therefore be interesting in this research to ascertain the views of professional practitioners on the role of higher education in preparing people for entry into the profession.

Having provided some insights into the role of higher education in Ireland, the next section deals specifically with the literature that examines the role of public relations education within higher education.

The Role of Public Relations Education within Higher Education

As has already been seen in this chapter, studies in public relations in Ireland vary in quality and duration and are offered by a number of providers. Findings from research by Stacks, Botan and Turk (1999) suggests that practitioners and academics believed a graduate degree prepared the student for entry-level into the field, whilst an MA primarily assisted practitioners to enter management or as a way to better understand theory and research as applied to the profession. A doctorate in public relations was described as a way to progress further in academia and to advance the field's body of knowledge.

The International Public Relations Association (IPRA) placed great emphasis on public relations education in Gold Papers 4,7 and 12, published respectively in 1982, 1990 and 1997. In Gold Paper 12, the IPRA (1997) contends that the 'Intellectual base' (p17) of public relations needs to be understood better by all involved with the industry. This intellectual base can be described as the major characteristic distinguishing professions from occupations:

....effective public relations practice requires knowledge, skill and intellect. Effective public relations practice usually is based on a solid body of knowledge that continues to develop and expand (IPRA, 1997, p18).

The IPRA (1997) proposed that the most logical place for the emergence of theory in any social science discipline is in a university programme of study. Similarly, according to Sriramesh & Verčič (2003), public relations education needs to stand on two pillars: a comprehensive body of knowledge and a pool of qualified educators who can impart and contribute to the building of this body of knowledge (p506).

This intellectual base of public relations should be better communicated by public relations and professionals, otherwise the IPRA (1997) says that the occupation may become nothing more than one-way publicity or press agency. Furthermore, the question must be addressed as to whether it is an issue if public relations practitioners are not qualified in the discipline that they are working in? Although it is a controversial issue, it seems that it need not be so. For example, the question of whether or not professionals working in the public relations

industry should have a *professional* qualification as looked at in a study featured in Pieczka & L'Etang, (2006), where the sample population (practitioners) were asked about the qualities required of a successful public relations operator. However, they found that practitioners do not identify specific knowledge but rather focus on personal qualities such as 'creativity, lateral thinking, flexibility, articulateness, persuasiveness, common-sense and integrity' (Pieczka & L'Etang 2006, p276). It will be interesting to see if Irish practitioners express similar viewpoints.

However, the IPRA expresses concern about practitioners not being qualified and highlighted this in their Gold Paper No.12 when the low enrolment figure for the Public Relations Society of America resulted in the IPRA having to cancel a senior-level professional development seminar it had planned at the North –western University near Chicago. Additionally, in 1995, the IPRA could not interest a sufficient number of senior – level practitioners to attend a professional development programme it had planned for Washington, DC (IPRA 1997).

Should various organisations such as the IPRA be concerned about whether or not public relations professionals have a relevant qualification? The answer to this may in fact be *which* qualification as the issue when establishing a framework of professional training services for public relations practitioners must de facto acknowledge the wide and diverse range of knowledge needed in public relations compared perhaps to some other professions (IPRA 1997). Examples of the increasingly specialised nature of public relations include digital media knowledge, media relations, employee communications, stakeholder communications, integrated marketing communications, public affairs, crisis public relations to name but a few.

In 2009 in the US, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) was awarded \$20,000 by the Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE) for a study of PR education programs around the world (www.prsafoundation.org). This project aimed to enhance professional standards at all levels of practice by creating an information base on how public relations is taught around the world. Although the study was based in the US, many of the education programmes reviewed in a recent study by Toth and Aldoory (2010) into global public

relations education, reflect the five-course standard that was suggested in the Report of the Commission of Public Relations Education (2006) - The Professional Bond.

Although Ireland was not included in this 'global' study, those modules recommended by the Professional Bond are on the syllabus in the college I teach in and they include: public relations principles, public relations writing, research methods and measurement, provision for internships or professional experience and campaigns or case studies.

Another study by Di Staso et al, (2009) focused on the state of public relations in the US and broke their study into five subsections: (1) demographics, (2) assessment of current outcomes, (3) hiring and promotion considerations, (4) essential curriculum content and (5) graduate progress. The focus of the study was on how well undergraduate curricula are keeping up with changes in education and whether the curricula is preparing students progress toward greater professionalism. One of the concerns of the findings, however, was that this progression may itself be an issue as it was not always found that entry level or advanced level practitioners were proficient in theory/research.

According to L'Etang & Pieczka (2006):

Public relations offers an opportunity for developing stimulating and broad curricula producing graduates with good skills and an understanding of a range of subjects from psychology, politics, sociology and organisational behaviour to media and cultural studies (p 440).

In my research of curricula content for public relations courses I found it somewhat surprising to see that as far as it could be ascertained, the generic principles of public relations by Grunig (2009) have not been widely referred to in academic literature – excluding Sriramesh & Verčič, (2009) and Verčič, Grunig and Grunig (1996). Two earlier principles of public relations including Ivy Ledbetter Lee's 'Declaration of Principles' and the 'Page Principles' and thirdly to the more recent Grunig's set of Principles of Public Relations are important as I argue that they are the very basis upon which public relations exists as an occupation. These principles are explained in the following paragraphs.

The earliest and most widely cited principles of public relations are those from Ivy Ledbetter Lee who in 1906 in the US issued a 'declaration of principles' to the US media in light of an ongoing coal strike. Lee was involved in advising coal operators on how they should respond to the strike and he issued his 'Declaration of Principles' hoping that it would (and it did) counteract other public relations practitioners who were issuing press releases or running advertisements that were meant to look like news stories (Turney, 2015). This is an excerpt from this declaration of principles which should be applied in public relations:

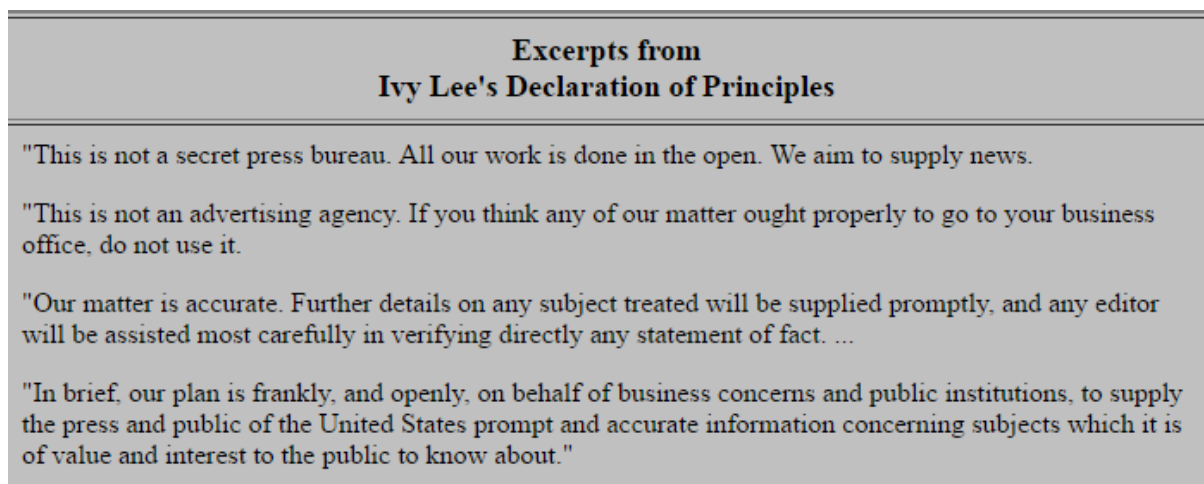


Figure 2 - Excerpt from Ivy Lee's Declaration of Principles Published in 1906

(Source: Turney, 2015).

The above figure shows Ivy Ledbetter Lee's 'Declaration of Principles' in which Lee made clear how he intended to work, including being accurate, open and transparent. The principles were to set new standards in how PR practitioners and the media dealt with each other. As noted by Hutton (1999), Ivy Lee positioned public relations on honesty, understanding and compromise, representing himself as a kind of a lawyer in the court of public opinion.

Another public relations practitioner whose principles were developed by a society named after him was Arthur W. Page. The Arthur W. Page Society developed seven principles of public relations (known as the 'Page Principles') based on Page's work in AT&T, the telecommunications company in the US from 1927-1946. Page practiced and developed

seven principles of public relations management as a means of implementing his philosophy.

These seven principles included:

- Tell the truth;
- Prove it with action;
- Listen to the customer;
- Manage for tomorrow;
- Conduct PR as if the whole company depended on it;
- Realise a company's true character is expressed by its people and
- Remain calm, patient and good-humoured (Henderson 2010).

More recently however, Grunig (2009, p2) outlines the key principles of public relations which show the emphasis on public relations being a strategic management function that promotes and practices ethically and socially responsible organisation decisions and behaviours.

Table 7 - Generic Principles of Public Relations

Public Relations Principle	Comment
1. Empowerment of public relations.	The chief communications officer is part of or has access to the dominant coalition or other coalitions of senior managers who make decisions in the organisation.
2. A separate management function.	Many organisations splinter the public relations function by making it a supporting tool for other departments such as marketing, human resources, law, or finance. When the function is sublimated to other functions, it cannot move communication resources from one strategic public to another as it becomes more or less important—as an integrated function can
3. Headed by a strategic manager rather than a communication technician or an administrative manager who supervises technical services.	Technicians are essential to carry out day-to-day communication activities. However, excellent public relations units have at least one senior manager who directs public relations programmes; otherwise this direction will be provided by members of the dominant coalition who have no knowledge of public relations
4. Involved in strategic management.	Public relations develops programmes to communicate with strategic publics, both external and internal, who are affected by the consequences of organisational decisions and behaviours and who either demand or deserve a voice in decisions that affect them—both

	before and after decisions are made.
5. Two-way and symmetrical communication.	Two-way, symmetrical public relations uses research, listening, and dialogue to manage conflict and to cultivate relationships with both internal and external strategic publics more than one-way and asymmetrical communication.
6. Diverse.	Effective organisations attempt to increase the diversity in the public relations function when the diversity in their environments increases. Excellent public relations includes both men and women in all roles, as well as practitioners of different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds
7. Ethical.	Public relations departments practice ethically and promote ethical and socially responsible organisational decisions and behaviours.

(Source: Grunig, 2009, p2)

The above table has been formulated from points made in Grunig (2009) outlining the key principles of public relations which show the emphasis on public relations being a strategic management function that promotes and practices ethically and socially responsible organisation decisions and behaviours.

This lack of inclusion of core principles of public relations in literature and in PR curricula is significant. This could be one of the reasons why there are threats from industry that continue to value MBA and marketing research and see the value of management principles to the detriment of public relations principles (Toth 2002). These principles are the very basis upon which public relations works as a profession. It is recommended that they should be included in education curricula as well as being referenced by public relations professional bodies in order to increase their awareness in PR practice.

A review of relevant literature also revealed a disconnect between public relations educator and practitioners (e.g. Wright et al, 2007; Commission on Public Relations Education 2006) and not enough dialogue about what is taught in PR curricula. Significant discussions have been had in relation to what public relations students should be taught while studying for an academic degree. Somerville, Purcell, & Morrison (2011) maintain that the simplistic dichotomies of academic vs practitioner, theory vs practice, education vs training, academic

research vs practitioner research are somewhat 'simplistic' (p 549). Alternatively they suggest that although there is an important place for vocational and technical elements in the PR curriculum to develop *useful* knowledge, that a *critical* approach as recommended by L'Etang and Pieczka (2006) is also important. More recently, Edwards (2016) also recommended taking more of a critical perspective and having the social, cultural and political effects of PR work rather than the occupation of PR as the centre of the curriculum.

Thus, the challenges for the PR educator and the student are many. I argue that although a PR curriculum needs to be specific to the societal and cultural environment in which it is located, the key role for PR education located within HE is the ability for students to focus on theory as well as the practical skills that are needed in the profession. This was substantiated by Theaker and Yaxley (2013) who propounded that although experience and training is good, using theory helps us to understand what works at a deeper level and is vital in enabling us to apply the lessons of experience.

Skills, Knowledge and Graduate Attributes.

Concerns in relation to employability and the role of higher education in creating *work ready* students has already been considered in the paragraphs above. In this section, in addition to examining research into what skills and knowledge are required by the PR occupation, a critical look is taken at the notion of graduate attributes and their place in higher education.

Skills

A review of literature in relation to *skills* required for a public relations entry-level graduate was found to cover an unclear display of skills and seemed to place attributes such as problem-solving alongside writing skills. Gregory (2008) rightly expressed frustration about this issue and even suggests the '*imprecision in the interpretation of what constitutes skills is endemic in the literature*' (p 216).

Therefore, for the purposes of this thesis, the term 'skills' will be used when referring to specific skills for the entry level graduate into public relations and 'graduate attributes' will be used when describing the more general competencies that PR graduates are expected to possess.

Elliot and Koper (2003) note that the PR industry emphasises the need for PR graduates who are independent thinkers and versatile doers, who can develop and implement strategies and tactics that will help an organisation to manage relationships with its internal and external publics. Similarly, DiStaso, Stacks and Botan (2009) wrote that public relations education is being called upon to provide strategic, international ethical and research methods training and leadership skills. In fact, Elliot and Koper (2003) propounded that education in the 21st century is not concerned with creating the manipulator of the past, but instead on the strategist who builds and maintains relationships between an organisation and its publics.

A summary of the skills found in the literature that are necessary for a career in public relations are highlighted in the following table.

Table 8 - Key Skills Required for Employment in Public Relations

Key skills found in the literature that are necessary for employment in public relations
Mastery of language in written and oral communication in one language and preferably second language skills
Digital skills
Public speaking and presentation
Technological and visual literacy
Ability to communicate publicly
Listening Skills
Numeracy and literacy skills
IT skills
Research skills.

(Source: Fawkes and Tench (2004) and Stacks, Botan and Turk (1999).)

The above table highlights some of the key skills found in international research to date on the level of skills required for an entry-level graduate.

Research specific to public relations to date indicates a number of skills that practitioners require from entry level graduates. For example, Stacks, Botan and Turk (1999) completed research in the US which showed that writing skills; ability to communicate publicly; interpersonal skills and practical experience were all top ranking hiring skills. Research completed by Fawkes and Tench (2004) revealed writing, literacy, IT skills and research skills to be critical for potential public relations practitioners.

In relation to new media, Alexander (2002 and 2004) recommends that the PR curriculum should focus on a range of specialist technological skills including database management, creating engaging and interactive websites, understanding software and being able to conduct online research.

Thus, the skills required to manage public relations are undergoing constant and dramatic change (Chan, 2004). In fact, recent research has revealed a significant skills gap globally in relation to the pathway between formal education and employment (McKinsey Centre for Government, 2013).

Knowledge

In a report named *The Professional Bond – Public Relations Education and the Practice* (2006), which focused on PR education within higher education, knowledge is explained as identifying what graduates should know and understand about public relations before entering the occupation. The report states that undergraduates should master the following knowledge as highlighted in the following table.

Table 9 - Knowledge Required by Public Relations Graduates Entering the Occupation

Knowledge required by public relations graduates entering the occupation
• Public relations history.
• Communication and persuasion concepts.
• Relationships and relationship building.
• Ethical issues.
• Legal requirements.
• Marketing management.
• Finance.
• Research.
• Multicultural and global issues and organisational change

(Source: Professional Bond, 2006)

Interestingly, all of those mentioned in the table above from the Professional Bond (2006) are on the PR curricula, not just on the course I teach in, but also in other courses in Ireland. The only module that does not seem to be on most PR courses that is mentioned in the Professional Bond (2006) in Ireland is finance. It will be interesting to see if this is an issue from the PR practitioner's perspective.

Graduate attributes

Separately in relation to *graduate attributes*, a diverse range of terminology is used to when referring to 'competencies' of higher education graduates. For example, increasing attention is being made to *generic skills*, or *basic skills* or *core skills*. Hager and Holland (2006) noted that this contemporary focus on *generic skills* has spread across education systems including in universities, where the term now often used is *graduate attributes*. However, given that the

focus of this research is on graduates entering the occupation of public relations, the terms *graduate attributes* and *attributes* are used interchangeably.

Green, Hammer and Star (2009) are advocates of the graduate attributes project, but argue that stakeholders such as government, business and universities have ‘grossly underestimated the changes needed for universities to give substance to the graduate skills agenda’ (p 18). Hager and Holland (2006) highlighted a range of graduate attributes that have gained attention, including thinking skills, effective communication, personal attributes, team work skills and values such as ethical practice integrity and tolerance. These graduate attributes have been highlighted in the table below.

Table 10 - Key Graduate Attributes that have gained attention in the HE Sector

Graduate Attributes
Thinking skills such as logical and analytical reasoning, problem solving and intellectual curiosity
Effective communication skills
Teamwork skills
Capacities to identify, access and manage knowledge and information
Personal attributes such as imagination, creativity and intellectual rigour
Values such as ethical practice, persistence, integrity and tolerance

(Source: Hager and Holland, 2006).

The table above highlights the range of graduate attributes that are now associated with higher education as noted by Hager and Holland (2006), which distinguish the various qualities and capacities from the discipline-specific knowledge and associated technical skills traditionally associated with higher education.

Barrie (2004) refers to a research-based policy framework that was developed at his university (Sydney University Australia). Based on three overarching *top-level enabling* graduate attributes of Scholarship, Global citizenship and Lifelong Learning, they are further supported by five *translation-level* attributes. These are highlighted in the following figures:

Scholarship

An attitude or stance towards knowledge

- Graduates of the university will have a scholarly attitude to knowledge and understanding. As scholars, the university's graduates will be leaders in the production of new knowledge and understanding through inquiry, critique and synthesis. They will be able to apply their knowledge to solve consequential problems and communicate their knowledge confidently and effectively

Global Citizenship

An attitude or stance towards the world

- Graduates of the university will be global citizens, who will aspire to contribute to society in a full and meaningful way through their roles as members of local, national and global communities

Lifelong Learning

An attitude or stance towards themselves

- Graduates of the university will be lifelong learners committed to and capable of continuous learning and reflection for the purpose of furthering their understanding of the world and their place in it.

Figure 3 - Top Level Enabling Attributes (Barrie, 2004, p 269)

The three overarching *top-level* attributes highlighted in the figure 3 are supported by the development of skills and abilities in five key clusters highlighted in the following figure 4:



Figure 4 - Enabling Graduate Attributes and Translation-Level Attributes (Source: Barrie 2004)

Figure 4 highlights graduate attributes as disciplinary clusters of personal attributes, cognitive abilities and skills of application:

- **Research and inquiry:** Graduates of the university will be able to create new knowledge and understanding through the process of research and inquiry.
- **Information literacy:** Graduates of the university will be able to use information effectively in a range of contexts.
- **Personal and intellectual autonomy:** Graduates of the university will be able to work independently and suitably in a way that is informed by openness, curiosity and a desire to meet new challenges.
- **Ethical, social and professional understanding:** Graduates of the university will hold personal values and beliefs consistent with their role as responsible members of local, national, international and professional communities.
- **Communication:** Graduates of the university will recognise and value communications as a tool for negotiation and creating new understanding, interacting with others and furthering their own learning. (Barrie, 2004, p 270).

It is therefore evident from the above figure and paragraph that frameworks exist from which public relations scholars can draw from to develop graduate attributes in higher education. However, it is a concern that higher education institutions have yet to develop teaching and learning strategies that can support graduate attributes and that can provide evidence of their achievement through appropriate criteria and standards (Barrie 2005). As noted by Green et al (2009), there needs to be a student-centred approach focusing on the *how to* as well as the *what* and the *why* so that the teacher begins from where the student is and clearly highlighting the expectations of the students' learning.

In relation to public relations specifically, research completed by Fawkes and Tench (2004) cited teamwork, problem solving and analytical thinking as important attributes. A project by the Global Alliance, the international umbrella organisation for public relations professional bodies, has analysed more than 30 competency, education and accreditation frameworks, from public relations associations from around the world. The result is the Global Body of Knowledge Project (also known as the GBOK project). The competencies for entry level graduates are outlined in the following table.

Table 11 - Key Competencies required by Entry Level Graduates in Public Relations

Key attributes required by entry level graduates for work in public relations
Digital and visual literacy abilities
Global awareness and monitors global news and issues
Management of information and knowledge
Critical thinking, problem solving and negotiation
Management of communication
Technological and visual literacy
Applying contextual, cross-cultural and diversity considerations
The ability to set strategy and contribute to the strategic direction of the organisation
listening skills
Ability to communicate publicly
Practical experience
Problem solving
Analytical thinking
Teamwork

(Source: GBOK 2014)

It will be interesting to ascertain if the competencies highlighted by Irish practitioners are similar. For example, probing views on ethics education will be interesting, given that in the public relations profession, ethical misconduct continues to make attractive headlines for journalists (Erzikova, 2010).

Hill, Walkington and France (2016) proffered that uniting disciplinary knowledge and skills with generic attributes '*enable mindful application of subject-specific expertise in academic and societal contexts*' (p 161) offering a bright future for public relations in higher education.

I would however argue that common sense needs to prevail in relation to what a student can learn within three to five years in a higher education environment. This was asserted by Hinchliffe (2006) who stated:

How many employers themselves possess such a dazzling array of attributes, I wonder? Can we realistically expect young men and women in their early twenties to already possess (or have to potential to possess very quickly) all those skills and attributes which it takes years for any normal intelligent person to develop (and even then most of us have a few gaps). (Hinchliffe, 2006 p 91).

It will be interesting to ascertain the views of senior PR Practitioners on what specific skills, knowledge and graduate attributes they think students should be engaging with before entering the occupation.

Chapter Summary

In summary, research so far in these chapters has examined public relations and its development in Ireland and the relationship between higher education and public relations education. Findings so far show that the most significant developments in PR education in Ireland were similar to countries in Europe and further afield where PR courses developed in the late 1970s and 1980s, further emphasising how young an academic discipline it is.

The literature revealed the theorists arguments for formal PR education. For example, Grunig (1989) propounded that practitioners without education in public relations are usually little more than press agents or journalists-in-residence, unless they are able to get equivalent knowledge through continuing education or self-study. Similarly, Waddington (2013) wrote that if expertise is rooted in education and continuous learning, core knowledge is readily transferable and that without academic rigour, the practice is limited to craft and tactics.

However, the review of the literature showed that there is a gap in current literature on practitioner perspectives in Ireland. L'Etang & Pieczka (2006) noted that although ultimately it is the professional educator who should be trusted with the task of designing courses, the opinion of practitioners are a valuable guide to many decisions that educators need to make. This gap in practitioner views was also particularly evident in recent research completed in Ireland by the professional body, the PRII who noted that there is 'extensive anecdotal evidence' (p 2) in relation to the effectiveness or not of PR education (PRII, 2014). Therefore, the lack of a body of empirical research in Ireland was an indication that this was a topic that was under researched in Ireland.

Based on this review and understanding of the literature, the following research questions emerged:

RQ1: What are practitioner's views on what public relations is and how the occupation has evolved in Ireland?

RQ2: What are practitioners' views on whether or not a PR qualification in HE is considered a pre-requisite for employment in public relations?

RQ3: What are the views of practitioners in relation to the skills, knowledge and attributes that graduates have - and should have - when they enter the industry?

This study aims to achieve an in depth understanding of the role that higher education plays in preparing public relations graduates for entry into the occupation. I aim to provide empirical data in order to offer an understanding from the perspective of senior professionals involved in the public relations industry in Ireland. Therefore, in the next chapter, an overview of the research process and strategy is described.

Chapter Five

Research Design and Methodology

The focus of this chapter is to highlight the research design, the methodology and the data collection/analytical procedures used. This study is an attempt to understand how professional practitioners view public relations education and specifically the role of higher education in Ireland in preparing public relations graduates for entry into the industry.

In this chapter, my interpretivist constructionist position is explored and the research methodology that underpins this enquiry justifying the reasons behind this choice. The methodologies of an interpretive, qualitative research design, as the ideal approach to address the research questions are defended.

The reasons for using semi-structured interviews are explained as is the reason for the selection of senior public relations practitioners in Ireland, totalling sixteen – eight of whom had received formal PR education and eight whom had not.

Research Design

A strong research design strengthens the authenticity of study and ensures the data collected properly addresses the research topic being studied (Yin, 2011). As an EdD student, attempts were made from the very outset to gain a sense of stability and direction in relation to methodological approaches, theoretical perspectives behind methodologies and what epistemology informs these theoretical perspectives. Reading Denzin & Lincoln (2011) assured me however that there is no one way to do interpretive, qualitative inquiry:

We are all interpretive bricoleurs stuck in the present, working against the past, as we move into a politically charged and challenging time (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p xiii)

Similarly, Smeyers et al (2015) stressed that interpretation enters into every stage of the research process and extends from the very framing of the research task, through the sources which constitute the data, the process of their recording, presentation and analysis to the way in which the research is finally or provisionally presented to others.

Research Approach

In deciding a research approach, Wellington et al (2005) suggest that one has to go beyond what is sometimes presented as *'a simple choice between qualitative/quantitative, positivistic, nomothetic, objective and the qualitative, interpretivist, idiographic and subjective'* (p 96). Additionally, in deciding to complete qualitative research, there was not a pre-conceived belief or as noted by Silverman (2000) that qualitative research is 'good' and quantitative is 'bad (p1).

The choice between using either qualitative or quantitative research was determined by my research objectives. My overall question was: "What is the role of higher education in Ireland in preparing public relations graduates for entry into the occupation?" This question lended itself to a qualitative approach as I wanted to provide a deeper understanding of views within a particular sector. As noted by L'Etang (2014), it is important to acknowledge the assumptions that have shaped the researchers approach. It is also important that I, as a potential researcher, am aware of the epistemological/ontological implications of opting for particular methodologies and methods. This is examined in the next section.

Theoretical Framework

The illustration below shows how I have perceived the theoretical framework journey. The iterative nature of research is indicated by the illustrating the number '8' which shows arrows to and from the literature to the findings and back again to literature. This back and forth nature of immersion was necessary in order to make sense of my data and also to understand the relevance of academic literature to the research findings. An explanation of this illustration is given underneath the figure.

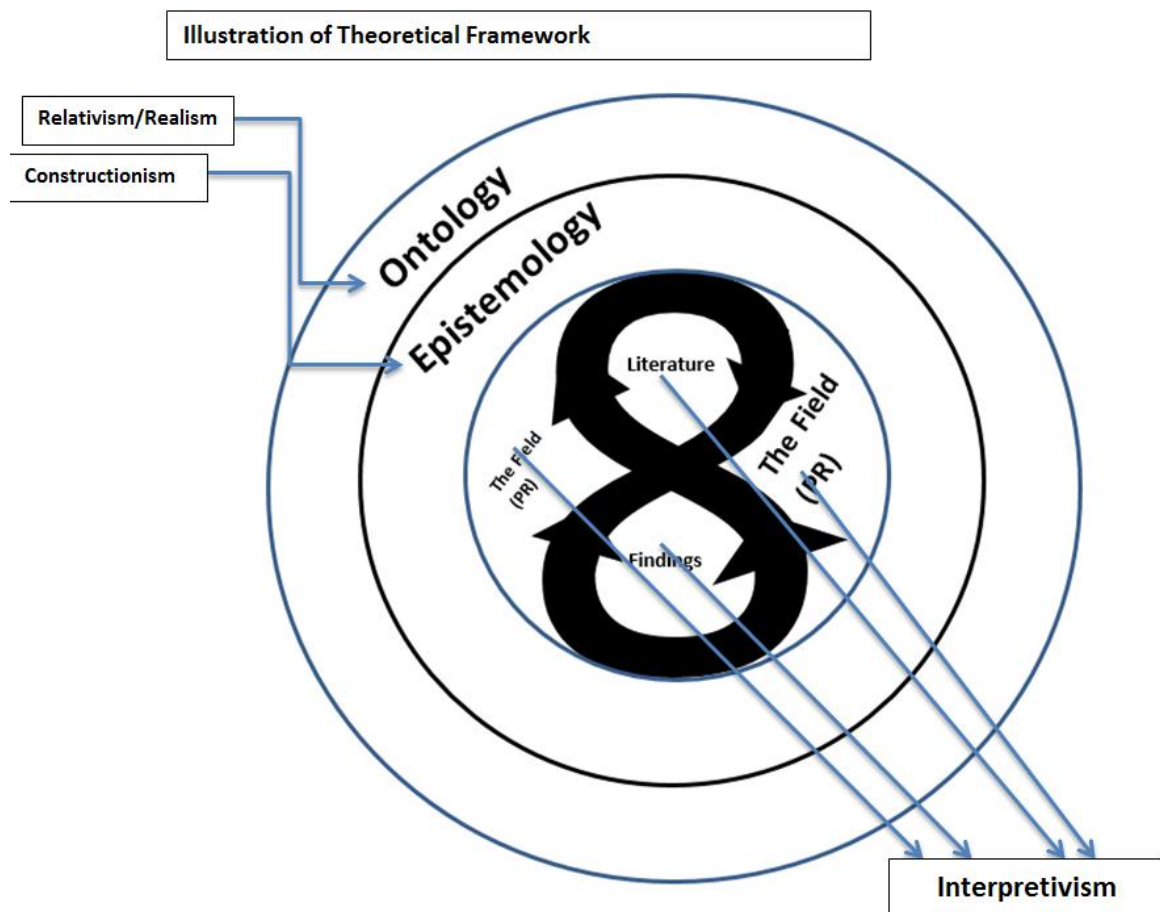


Figure 5 - Illustration of my theoretical framework journey

The figure above illustrates how I have seen my theoretical framework journey and I expand on the explanation of this illustration in the following paragraphs.

Ontology: Ontology is specifically concerned with the nature of the world (Thomas, 2009).

Or as noted by Heath et al (2015):

From a philosophical perspective, ontology is about being. It is the study of the nature of being and the categories of being. Ontology tells us what exists and helps us to categorise what exists (Heath et al 2015, p 706).

I argue here that my ontological approach is both realist and relativist. If reality is socially constructed, this does not mean to say that it is not real (Crotty 1998). Therefore the meanings emanating from the reality of my findings are socially constructed, and informed the sense that I have interpreted from them. My assumptions are realist in the sense that I accept a world that is driven by power, competition and conflict (L'Etang 2010, p151). However, perhaps because of my interest in theology and personally in being an active member of communities and society, I do additionally assume a relativist position (Heath, 1997, p 60) as in the *good organisation, communicating well is upheld as the ideal*' (Ihlen, 2010, p 64). But in probing what is *good* and what is *bad*, Heath (1997) suggests a relativist approach as it privileges '*people in society to struggle in concert to reduce differences, to compromise and to have opinions challenged*' (Heath, 1997, p 60).

I found the area of ontological perspective particularly important to keep in mind when displaying the data in this thesis because as Creswell (2013) noted, it is important to use the actual words of different individuals and present different perspectives in order to highlight the different realities that exist including those of the readers of this thesis, the practitioners and my own realities. In my findings chapter therefore, there are a significant amount of quotes which have been kept rather than summarising into paragraphs.

Epistemology: Epistemology has its roots in philosophy and is concerned with the theory of knowledge. It encompasses '*how we know what we know*' (Crotty, 1998, p 8), who notes that there are a range of epistemologies including objectivism, constructionism and subjectivism.

My epistemological approach is that of constructionism which centres on the interactional constitution of meaning in every-day life, the leading principle being that the world we live in and our place in it are not simply and evidently *there* but rather variably brought into being (Holstein and Gubrium, 2011). Constructionism suggests that meaning is not discovered, but constructed. Different people may construct meaning in different ways, highlighting that truth or meaning come into existence as a result of our engagement with the realities in our world. (Crotty, 1998, p 9). Therefore, as a former public relations practitioner and present educator, it was important that I was aware of '*where I was coming from*' or '*where the researcher is coming from*' (Sikes 2004, p 3) in terms of social reality and ontological assumptions.

The nature of knowledge (epistemological assumptions) and their human nature and agency, inevitably then, have implications for my research related understandings, beliefs and values, for the research paradigms that I feel most comfortable with and thereby for the research approach taken. Additionally, Wellington (2005) notes that one of the roles of any researcher in education is to examine and question the positions or assumptions which are often taken for granted. Wellington advocated that researchers must ask questions and reflect on their own values, ideas, knowledge, motivation and prejudices – e.g. what are my relevant past experiences and prior knowledge? Am I carrying a bias, a prejudice, or insider information which will affect my role as researcher?

Interpretivism: There are a range of theoretical perspectives that support different epistemological viewpoints and the key difference that is made between theoretical perspectives is between positivism and interpretivism (Crotty, 1998). A positivist is often described as a belief that the world is capable of objective interpretation and that social science should follow methods and methodologies established in the natural sciences (Hammond and Wellington 2013). A positivist perspective was not suitable for this research because the focus would have been upon the quantification of public relations education rather than an in-depth study into the views of senior practitioners on their views of public relations education.

Crotty (1998) noted that interpretivism is linked to the thoughts of German sociologist, Max Weber (1864-1920) who suggested that the human sciences are concerned with understanding. Other literature such as that from Powers and Knapp (2010) highlight that in addition to Weber, the intellectual roots of interpretive research approaches called the *interpretive turn* can be traced back to philosopher Dilthey's (1833-1911) rejection of empiricism as well as the efforts of sociologist Shutz (1899-1959) to define the work of their discipline in terms of *understanding* as that applies to the subjective meanings that people give to their actions.

Thus, interpretivism is suited to this research because it places an emphasis on understanding and this research is concerned with understanding the views of practitioners. Additionally, an interpretive approach acknowledges the existence of multiple realities and recognises that understanding is socially constructed. As is illustrated by this theoretical framework, the emphasis on subjective understanding matches the aim of this research, which ultimately examines what the role of higher education in Ireland is in preparing public relations graduates for entry into the occupation

Abductive Research Strategy

What was particularly important for me in framing my interpretive approach was that this type of research (i.e. interpretive) acknowledges the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is being explored. Therefore, in a study in which the views and perspectives of public relations practitioners were being explored, there needed to be an acknowledgement of the philosophical basis of the research strategy.

An abductive research strategy (Blaikie 2010) was advanced as it spans both induction and deduction: theory is neither solely generated at the beginning of this research project then tested throughout it, nor is it just produced at the end, (Blaikie 2010). Neither inductive nor deductive approach seemed to fit because, as noted by Yin (2011), inductive approaches tend to let the data lead to the emergence of concepts. Deductive tend to let the concepts lead to

the definition of the relevant data that needs to be collected. Although concepts did emerge from my data and could therefore be deemed deductive, my approach also involved revising the research questions as the data emerged and was more of an abductive approach.

Additionally, secondary analysis in the preceding chapters consisted of both published literature and some previously unpublished work. This previously unpublished work, some of which contained original artefacts were given on loan to me by a private collector, when it came to his attention that they were to be destroyed in an office move. These documents were of relevance in meeting one of the research objectives of this thesis, which was to outline a contemporary history and development of public relations education in Ireland. As noted by McCulloch (2004), such documentation can provide worthiness in research:

Manuscript materials held in archives and private collections would occupy the first level of the hierarchy of primary documentary sources....In this sense, unpublished and relatively inaccessible documents appear to carry greater intrinsic worth to the historical researcher than published documents that are widely available. (McCulloch, 2004, p 27).

The core distinctiveness of an abductive research strategy is that it is iterative and involves periods of the research immersing themselves in the relevant social world (Blaikie, 2010, 156). An abductive research strategy was therefore suitable for the investigation of PR practitioner's views on the role of PR education in HE.

Selection of Participants

In order to ensure the generalisability and reliability of this research, the selection of interviewees was very important. In deciding what sample to choose, consideration needed to be made about choosing from a broad range of sectors, including practitioners from corporate, consumer and political PR backgrounds. The basis of my sampling decisions needed to be clearly identified as this enabled me to establish the boundaries of my research (Daymon and Holloway, 2011).

Qualitative researchers tend to select purposive non-probability sampling as it helps in the understanding of the ideas and perceptions of the participants in a given context at a particular time (Patton, 2002). The selection of participants was purposeful. Purposive sampling involves the selection of a sample that the research already knows something about where he/she selects particular participants that are likely to provide the most valuable data (Denscombe, 2007).

Most importantly was the selection of actors in relation to education. My initial intention with this research was to complete a triangulated study targeting PR educators, students and practitioners. However, given the restriction of word count of the thesis, plus being swamped in data, senior practitioners working in Ireland were targeted. But again, in order to ensure the authenticity of this research and richness of data, and in light of the topic covering PR education, eight actors selected had formal PR education and eight had none. The reason for this selection process was to reflect the fact that many senior participants working in the occupation had not received any formal education specifically in public relations. It was important to get their insights and views about the occupation of public relations.

Finally, all participants were senior PR practitioners practising in Ireland. It is important to unpack the word 'senior' because many practitioners could be working in public relations for many years, but not necessarily have reached a senior level within the industry. As Gregory (2015) noted:

Experience as defined by years of activity is dangerous – it is perfectly possible to have 10 years' experience of doing the same thing and never developing to any significant extent. The reality is that experience and expertise is 'lumpy', we are all novices at some things, but can be highly expert at others (Gregory, 2015 p1).

Therefore, the seniority of practitioners in the broad meaning of the word was important to address in order to ensure that the findings generated data from one cohort rather than from participants who were entry level or early practitioners making the data less reliable.

Once the selection criteria was decided, I contacted senior academics within my own personal network for any referrals they recommended in devising an appropriate selection list and I also trawled through various online sources such as the social media networking website known as *LinkedIn*.

A full breakdown of all participants (pseudonyms used) are relayed in the following tables. In line with the agreement of confidentiality made with the public relations practitioners, name references used in quotations in this thesis have been changed.

Table 12 - Participant Profiles – Interviewees a): Senior PR Practitioners without Formal PR Education

Name (all pseudonyms)	Formal PR education	Formal HE	Background	Presently working in Inhouse PR or PR Consultancy	Member of PRII/PRCA (PR's professional bodies in Ireland)	Gender
1. Matilda	No	Yes. Graduate of the Certificate in Journalism Course from the College of Commerce in Rathmines, Dublin.	Managing Director of her own PR company	Both	Yes	Female
2. Edward	No	No	Now retired. Worked inhouse with a semi-state company	Inhouse	Yes	Male
3. Roger	No	Yes. Degree from Trinity College in Arts, English, Philosophy and Economics.	Chairman of large public relations company since the 1970s.	Consultancy	Yes	Male
4. Ódhrán	No	Yes. Dublin City University	Former government press secretary. Now working in PR consultancy.	Consultancy	Yes	Male
5. Michael	No	No	Specialised in public affairs and lobbying, but also engaged in financial PR. Retired although still actively blogging.	Consultancy	Yes	Male
6. Sally	No	No	Chairperson of a media consultancy business in Dublin.	Consultancy	No – “not a joiner”	Female
7. Thomas	No	Yes. Stirling University	Holds a PhD in unrelated area and an MBA from Smurfit School of Business.	Inhouse	Yes	Male
8. Carl	No	No	MD of a Public Relations company.	Consultancy	Yes	Male

Table 13 - Participant Profiles – Interviewees b): Senior PR Practitioners with formal PR Education.

Name - all pseudonyms	Formal PR education	Formal HE	Background	Working in Inhouse PR or PR Consultancy	Member of PRII/PRCA (PR's professional bodies in Ireland)	Gender
1. Kelly	Yes, PRII accredited course by night	No	Currently client director of large corporate Public Relations company. Formerly worked in in-house consumer and corporate companies.	Consultancy	No	Female
2. Ruby	Yes. A postgraduate diploma (now a Masters) in public relations in DIT Rathmines and then went into industry.	Yes. BA in Arts in UCD	Formerly worked in consultancy and her own PR company. Now working inhouse	Both	No	Female
3. Ella	Yes. A postgraduate diploma (now a Masters) in public relations in DIT Rathmines and then went into industry.	Yes. BA in Communications at DCU	Presently working as Head of Communications with political party in Ireland. Former head of various governmental Public Relations departments	Inhouse	No	Female

Table 13 Continued on next page

4. Niall	Yes. Communications in DCU	Yes. DCU	Presently working as an independent communications advisor. Formerly Managing Director in a large PR consultancy	Consultancy	Yes	Male
5. Pdraig	Yes. Fitzwilliam PR Course (Dublin)	Yes. Computer Science and Economics in UCD.	Working in global public relations consultancy.	Consultancy	No	Male
6. Bella	Yes A postgraduate diploma (now a Masters) in public relations in DIT Rathmines and then went into industry.	Yes , Communications in DCU	Formerly worked in PR consultancies and now works for large controversial public sector government organisation	Inhouse	Yes	Female
7. Molly	Yes. PRII accredited course by night.	No	Started career as a fashion model and then set up her own consumer public relations agency	Consultancy	Yes	Female
8. Elaine	Yes– Certificate course in Rathmines College of Commerce (now DIT, Rathmines)	Yes – Certificate course in Rathmines College of Commerce (now DIT, Rathmines)	Financial Public Relations	Consultancy	Yes	Female

Both of the tables above give details of the profiles of participants who were interviewed for this research. The first table gives details of those who had formal public relations education and the second table highlights information on those who did not. Again, it is important to point out that the reason for choosing this selection process was because many senior

practitioners in the occupation of public relations had not received any formal education, explicitly in public relations.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Utilising semi-structured interviews was an appropriate choice of technique as a range of viewpoints, perceptions and perspectives from practitioners were gathered which would not have been possible with formally structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews follow a conversational mode and present the opportunity for two-way interaction. Researchers use semi-structured interviews to explore the views and opinions of their participants (Gray, 2009). In using semi-structured interviews, more flexibility was available in terms of the ordering and structure of questions and the answers were open-ended giving the interviewee more chances to develop ideas and thoughts, as observed by Denscombe (2003).

Yin (2011) also noted that in some cases, the participant may query the interviewee. I found this particularly so with one participant, who ‘stopped me in my tracks’ so to speak when I commenced with the ‘warm up’ style question of ‘*what is your typical working day like*’ question. She immediately asked me ‘what is it that *you* think I do?’ Although I wasn’t expecting this approach, I did ‘think on my feet’ and respond with an answer. She then ‘tapped the table’ and simply said ‘*Good. Let’s continue*’. It seems here that the participant, whom has, similar to a lot of professionals, an extremely busy working life, wanted to ascertain at the very outset if I as a researcher, had my own homework done and was only happy to give of her valued time, once she knew that the interviewer wasn’t wasting her time.

The Interview Process

In all cases, the interviewees responded on the same day that the initial email was sent inviting the interviewer to participate. All participants immediately accepted the offer of being interviewed. This proved interesting in the analytical stage, as it became clear that participants want to be involved in public relations education but they’ve just ‘*never been asked*’ (Sally, NPRG).

Interviews were held in locations chosen by the interviewee, which tended to be either the public relations practitioner’s office or their home. In two instances, one was held in a hotel

foyer and the other in a pub as both practitioners were working in political public relations, and were either on their way home from work or on their way to a work function.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Regarding confidentiality, all interviewees were assured of anonymity as stated in their information letter and in their consent form:

At all stages, the content of the interview will be confidential to me (and my supervisor) and your identity will not be disclosed. This is to enable you to speak freely and openly about your own background and how you view the present and future development of the occupation. (See appendix two).

The Interview Schedule

The interviews were semi-structured in format (see appendix four for a list of questions asked) and were designed to probe the following areas:

- i) *How the practitioner ended up working in public relations and how education (or not) influenced their career decision*
- ii) *The kinds of work the practitioner has undertaken in public relations*
- iii) *Practitioner's views on higher education as a preparation for work in public relations*
- iv) *Practitioner's views and perspectives on public relations education within higher education*
- v) *Practitioner's views on the skills, knowledge and attributes that graduates need for entry into the industry.*

An example of probing an interview further but having the sense to know there was no point in probing any further:

Are you involved with any professional organisations in PR?

PARTICIPANT: No, no, I'm not a joiner.
INTERVIEWER: Ever?
PARTICIPANT: Never.
INTERVIEWER: OK, and do you want to expand on that?
PARTICIPANT: Oh yeah, people need things to play with.

The interviewee stopped speaking after saying the last sentence. I kept silent for about ten seconds (although it seemed an eternity) in the event that she wanted to elaborate further, but clearly, she did not.

Pilot Interview

Two pilot interviews were completed. The first was with a practitioner who had formal public relations education and the other was with a practitioner without formal PR education. The initial pilot interview lasted 90 minutes but after being transcribed and listened back to, I realised that a lot of timewasting was occurring compounded by a lack of steering on my part in getting the interviewee to stick to the point. I was guided here by the writing of Yin (2011) who emphasised the importance of ‘listening’ and ‘sizing up’ (Yin, 2011, p 27) a participant’s mood - expected friendliness (or aloofness), and taking note of body language and intonations were as important as hearing the words being spoken. Of course, in addition, my own experience as a former public relations practitioner during which time I personally completed media interviews was helpful. For example, use of non-verbal communication such as ‘nodding’ when understanding a practitioner’s comment and showing active listening, proved helpful. Subsequent interviews lasted approximately 40 minutes.

Although some data from the first pilot interview proved of benefit in formulating themes, data from the second pilot interview was not used. The participant was a former student of mine and had been working in the industry for approximately four years. It was clear to me upon completion of the interview that the participant was employed as a PR ‘technician’ role whereas my design incorporated ensuring the views from senior practitioners were being targeted. Therefore, the rigorousness of my research would be compromised if the data were used. All practitioners subsequently interviewed were the most senior public relations practitioners in Ireland and were very much part of the ‘dominant coalition’ as referred to in Grunig (2004).

Authenticity

Yin (2011) noted that a valid study is one that properly collects and interprets data so that the conclusions accurately reflect and represent the real world. Additionally, Cutler (2004) emphasised the importance of a close relationship between research design and validity of results if doing research that influences practice as well as contributing to theory building.

However, Daymon and Holloway (2011) cautioned qualitative researchers in using a term such as validity which they argue has been derived from quantitative research (and a positivist paradigm)' (p 78). Instead, it is suggested that the term authenticity is more appropriate. In describing authenticity, it is noted:

‘A study is authentic when the strategies you have used for the ‘true’ reporting of participants’ ideas, when the study is fair, and when it helps participants and similar groups to understand their world and improve it’. (Daymon and Holloway, 2011, p 84).

In order to ensure the authenticity of the data, two sets of actors were selected. Eight of those interviewed had formal public relations education and the other eight had entered the occupation by other means. (The findings chapters will expand on how the latter entered the occupation). In addition, *all* participants were senior public relations practitioners. The sample was drawn from practitioners across a broad spectrum of the industry including the corporate, consumer and political public relations industry, yet again ensuring that the data could be generalised in an industry that is very diverse.

Sargent (2012) stressed that one of the most important tasks in the study design phase is the selection of participants. Therefore, in order to further ensure the authenticity of the data, it was important to get views from a broad spectrum of participants because as noted by Wright (2011), the quality of the PR curriculum is being hindered by feedback normally emanating from PR practitioners who are truly supportive of PR education. Because my selection included participants with and without formal PR education, the findings are significant and of value in getting insights from a broad spectrum of participants about PR education in Ireland.

Questions of Reliability

The reliability of the results was ensured not only by making sure that a diverse range of practitioners were chosen, but it was also interesting to note how similar the findings were from this research and that of a review which was completed by the professional body in Ireland, the Public Relations Institute of Ireland (PRII). The National Council of the PRII wanted to review its approach to education to establish the currency and value of its education offering and to determine the correct approach to underpin future activity. Whilst their review focused on PR education from the professional bodies point of view, it was interesting to note that their findings in one section of the report - which examined the views of PR practitioners in relation to PR education in Ireland - were remarkably similar in a lot of areas. For example, the PRII (2014) noted that a qualification in higher education is generally a pre-requisite for working in the PR industry but ‘almost none’ (22 were interviewed), cited a PR specific qualification as a prerequisite noting that they would undertake required training “on the job”. Similarly, significant amount of practitioners interviewed for this study were of a comparable viewpoint. For example, Ella (PRG) noted: *‘I do think it’s important for people to have gone through the third-level system. I don’t think it necessarily matters what they have studied’*.

Data Saturation

The reliability of this study also depended on ensuring that data saturation had been reached. As noted by Bowen (2008), data saturation entails bringing new participants continually into the study until the data set is complete (p 140). Additionally, Strauss and Corbin (1990) wrote that theoretical saturation is the point at which no new insights are obtained, no new themes are identified and no issues arise regarding a category of data. Therefore, sufficiency in terms of numbers of participants is related to the purpose of the research, the nature of the method, methodology and the questions being asked (Baker and Edwards, 2012). As a result, I was cognisant throughout the interview process of ensuring that data saturation had been

reached. After completing sixteen face to face interviews, it was evident that this was the case.

Ethical Issues

The ethical dimensions of the interview were not overlooked, and as stated in Cohen et al (2000), ensuring informed consent, guarantees of confidentiality, beneficence and non-maleficence (i.e. that the interview may be to the advantage of the respondent and will not harm him/her) was a pre-requisite. It was also important to agree taping procedures beforehand - as well as that noted by Cohen et al (2000) that clarification on what is said when recording is turned off, can/cannot be included. The length of time that was taken by the interviewer was also agreed beforehand as noted in Bell (1999).

Confidentiality

Confidentiality was assured to all participants. All transcripts, notes and audiotapes were stored securely at the researcher's home and the names of practitioners were disguised.

Consent.

Consent was obtained from all participants in writing. Each participant received a letter outlining the research and a consent form for their records. A sample copy of consent forms and correspondence sent to each participant can be seen in the appendices.

Analysis of Interview Data – Thematic Analysis

Analysing qualitative data does not have a universally accepted route (Yin 2011), but it (qualitative data) does require deep analysis (Bazeley 2009). Although the use of NVivo software assisted me in managing my data, I was more reliant on the thematic process in my interpretive analysis. Thematic analysis is a method of identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) with data (Braun and Clarke, 2008 p79). The six stages outlined by Braun and Clarke (2008) were helpful in helping to establish themes within the data. These six stages are highlighted in the following table.

Table 14 - Phases of Thematic Analysis

Phase	Description of the Process
1.Familiarising yourself with the data	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2.Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3.Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme
4.Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis
5.Definine and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6.Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

(Source: Braun and Clarke, 2006 p87)

The above table highlights the six phases of thematic analysis as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). These are expounded upon in the following paragraphs

1. Phase One of Analysis - Familiarisation with the Data: Every interview was transcribed verbatim. Damon and Holloway (2011) noted that the ‘fullest and richest data’ (p 234) is gained from such transcription. Attempts were made initially to complete the transcribing of interviews myself, but I soon realised that time was an issue as one hour of interviewing was taking approximately nine hours to transcribe. Therefore, a professional typist was hired and a confidentiality agreement was signed with this transcriber. Quotes used in this thesis were rechecked for accuracy from the original recordings. Re-reading my initial thoughts following interviews, as well as reading and re-reading transcripts also helped ensure that rigour was maintained throughout.

The initial analytical stage commenced once the interviews had begun. I was most aware of my own epistemological and ontological positioning and of the seniority of each participant’s worldly experience being proffered. As soon as the interview was completed, I always ensured I allocated additional time to write down my initial thoughts following the meeting. For example, notes taken following some of the interviews are highlighted in the following table:

Table 15 - Example of Initial Notes taken following each Participant Interview

Interview no. 1 (Pilot) - Thomas (NPRG) – first interview. Thought it went great although far too long. Need to discipline myself to avoid ‘straying’. When I played it back, I cringed at how much I said ‘wow’... I need to ‘interact’ more. Some very valuable data here, not least Thomas’ reference to the importance of theory in practice.

Interview no. 2 (Pilot) - Susan (PRG) – don’t think I’ll be using this. It just wasn’t great. I’ll play it back again to check if any data relevant, but I think if I am interviewing senior practitioners, this may just not be suitable. Also, Susan felt that I was still her lecturer (she’s a former undergraduate student) – not the dynamic I wanted particularly, although understandable from her point of view. It did however strike me that although Susan is working in the PR industry, it would be great if she progressed on to completing a Masters. She still hasn’t developed a sense of ‘analytical maturity’ that would benefit her – and her organisation.

Interview no. 3 - Ódhrán (NPRG) – Senior government press secretary to three Taoisigh (Prime Ministers) in Ireland. Interesting to note from his interview that he doesn’t think the PR practitioner has any decision making powers. This will be worth exploring although ultimately it may not be relevant to my core research question. There’s a lot of literature being written though about decision making in public relations – if this develops

as a theme, it may be worth considering writing a research paper after the doctorate is completed on this topic.

Interview no. 4 - Bella (PRG) - She has an extensive range of experience in PR industry. Currently studying for an MBA. Has post-grad dip in PR. I met her on the day of an ongoing public crisis in their organisation so was very grateful for her giving of her time. She sees the role of PR being very important to be at corporate/board level advising BEFORE decisions are made so that the impact of all decisions can be conveyed to management team before final decision made. Public Relations is represented at senior board level. She views adaptability as important for students to have as well as lots of common sense. She mentioned about intangible assets having increased of late on the balance sheets of a lot of PLCs. I need to check this out further as there may be something in this for my lit review in relation to the growth of PR industry.

The above table shows my initial thoughts following some of the interviews. I found this particularly helpful, not just in the initial analytical phase, but also in the final stages of writing up. For example, the reference to ‘intangible assets’ referred to in interview number four proved to be a key finding in justifying the ‘so what’ of my research. When I probed this comment further, it was found that intangible assets are now rated *higher* than tangible assets for the top stock market companies internationally (Gregory, 2015) and proved that intangible assets such as ‘reputation’ ‘communications’ and ‘relationships’ – the business of public relations – are now more important than ever.

2. Phase Two of Analysis - Generating Initial Codes

The data was coded in NVivo and repeated themes across the dimensions were sought and then grouped in the categories that are presented in the findings and discussion sections of this thesis. Good analysis required efficient management of one's data (Dey 1993).

Therefore, the interviews were transcribed and then analysed with the assistance of NVivo. Use of the computer aided software known as 'NVivo' proved valuable in assisting with this analysing process. This software however does not 'do' the analysis, it merely served as an aid in managing and storing the data at all stages of the analytical process.

The initial coding of the sixteen interviews generated a large volume of coded material. The figure below shows 143 initial 'nodes' which were created using NVivo software.

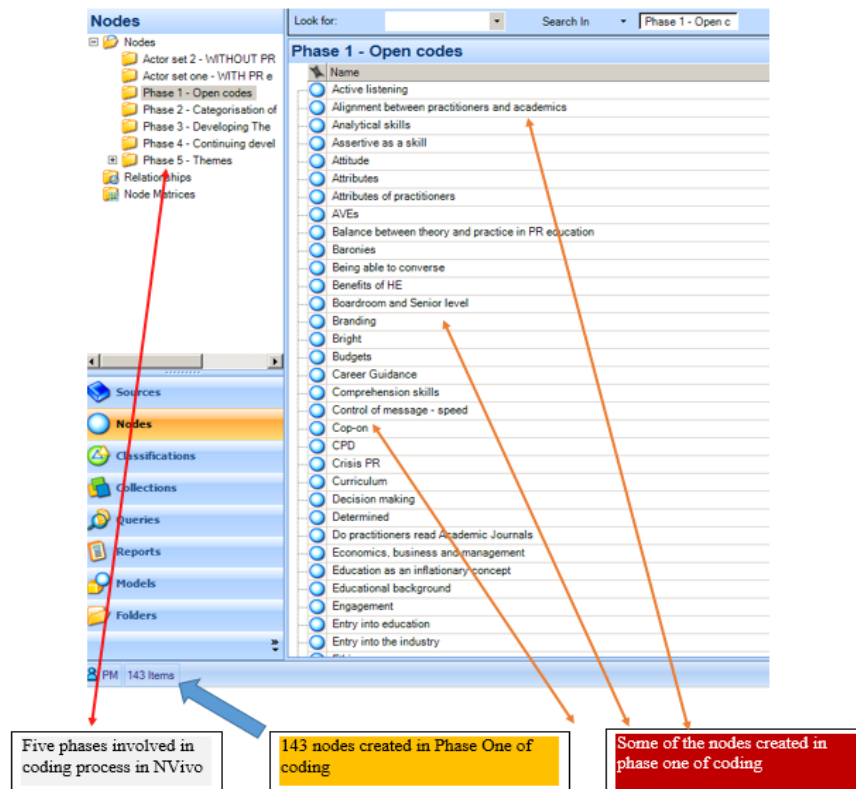


Figure 6 - Phase One of Coding in NVivo. 143 codes were created in this phase.

The figure above shows a sample of work completed using the NVivo software. This shows a sample of some of the nodes that were initially created and the five phases that were involved in the coding process. A total of 143 nodes were created in phase one.

3. Phase Three – Searching for Themes

This stage involved categorizing the different codes into potential themes and assigning the relevant coded extracts to the specific themes. Once nodes were initially created on NVivo, the next stage of coding involved both full sentences and smaller elements of dialogue, generated by the open coding process, formed the units of data or incidences. These were then exported into another folder (phase 2) to facilitate sorting and searching, looking for similarities and differences between the units that the patterns which subsequently became the themes that emerged in phase 5. The process of coding did not just involve utilising the computer aided software of NVivo. I found it equally helpful for a family member to read out loud each transcript whilst I read it on the computer screen. Additionally, I imported all interviews onto a CD which I sometimes played whilst driving to and from work.

4. Phase Four – Reviewing Themes

The purpose of this phase is to review and refine the different themes and consider whether they correlated with the coded extracts. I was somewhat concerned if my themes *were* themes as they were not mentioned in quantifiable terms throughout the transcripts. However, Braun and Clarke (2006) noted that a theme captures something important about the data and its keyness may not necessarily depend on quantifiable measures, but rather on whether it captures something important in relation to the research questions (p 82). My themes as highlighted included:

- The Identity of Public Relations in Ireland
- Academic Legitimacy
- Skills, Knowledge and Attributes

Table 16 - Themes Developed following Braun and Clarke's (2006) Thematic Process

Question	Sub-headings derived from coding process	Overall themes (following Braun & Clarke's analytical thematic process).
<p>RQ1: What are practitioner's views on what public relations is and how the occupation has evolved in Ireland?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is PR?; • Relationships between PR practitioners and journalists; • Tensions and concerns about how the PR industry has evolved; • Views on the professional bodies in Ireland; • Views on accreditation and ethics. • Gender Balance 	<p>The Identity of Public Relations in Ireland</p>
<p>RQ2: What are practitioners' views on whether or not a PR qualification in HE is considered a pre-requisite for employment in public relations?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Views on whether or not PR in HE is a pre-requisite for employment in Ireland. • Views on HE • Views on PR Education 	<p>Academic Legitimacy</p>
<p>RQ3: What are the views of practitioners in relation to the skills, knowledge and attributes that graduates have - and should have - when they enter the industry?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills • Knowledge • Attributes 	<p>Skills, Knowledge and Attributes.</p>

5. Phase Five of Analysis – Defining and Naming Themes

This analytical stage involved iterative analysis to refine the specific of each theme and to hone the overall story that the analysis is telling. Given that my interviews were with the most senior practitioners in Ireland representing the ‘dominant coalition’, extensive quotes are used in the analysis chapter. It was felt that this was necessary as these interviewees are powerful people and therefore justice needed to be done to the exact words that they used.

The ‘turn to language’ as described by Willig and Stainton (2010, p 13) was an important part of the discursive analysis process used in my thesis. This was important as I was particularly struck when interviewing participants how intelligent, colourful, sometimes eloquent and sometimes brash the language was which was used by some interviewees. For example, this is a quote from one interviewee in relation to senior managers who were not interested in working with the public relations department:

They would, they would see their own position as a barony.....where you had an organisation which was a series of hermetically sealed baronies where each had their own jealously guarded boundaries and they didn’t co-operate with anybody else, and anybody else didn’t co-operate with them, and it’s a wonder the organisation survived at all... (Edward, NPRG)

This is another quote from an interviewee who was very colourful in her language and probably worthy at some stage of completing a discursive analysis of her transcript alone:

I have ended up training them for no good reason for free just because I think it’s awful that they have, you know, that they have missed out on this, but I don’t understand why it wasn’t on their course and they can tell me all sorts of theoretical shit but they don’t have a clue about actually doing radio or television or any of that. (Sally, NPRG)

‘Turn to language’ therefore describes an intellectual orientation which pays attention to how our ways of talking about and representing ‘reality’ contribute to its very appearance and effects. This analysis process provided me with the tools for a fundamental critique which uncritically deploy commonsense concepts (such as prejudice, anger, aggression, self-esteem, intelligence) and seeks to measure them (Willig and Stainton 2010, p 13).

6. Phase Six – Producing the Report

Braun and Clarke (2006) state that this final stage of analysis, producing the report is the final opportunity for analysis. Strategies used here to enrich the analysis of qualitative data included:-

- improving interpretation and naming of categories;
- using comparison and pattern analysis to refine and relate themes;
- using divergent views and negative cases to challenge generalisations;
- returning to substantive, theoretical or methodological literature;
- creating displays using matrices, graphs, flow charts and models;
- and using writing itself to prompt deeper thinking. (Bazeley 2009, p6).

The analytical process highlighted the abductive research approach that adopted an iterative process of analysis moving between data and existing literature on public relations education.

The interpretive process does not however finish with the findings and analysis/discussion complete, but additionally includes the conclusions reached in my study. Yin (2011) asks some pertinent questions that I took some time to reflect on in relation to my study. These points can be seen in the following table.

Table 17 - Key Questions and Reflections about Conclusions reached in Research

Yin's (2011) key questions to ask about research conclusions when using interpretive analysis:	My reflections:
Completeness (Does my interpretation have a beginning, middle, and end?)	My epistemological and ontological positioning from the very outset.
Fairness (Given your interpretive stance, would others with the same stance arrive at the same interpretation?)	I guess this is hard for me to say, but attendance at – and presenting at – various PR conferences/seminars throughout the duration of the EdD have helped ensure rigour and validity.
Empirical accuracy (Does your interpretation fairly represent your data?)	Yes. I was at all times cognisant of the multiple roles taken on as researcher (e.g. insider, former practitioner, academic) throughout the research process.
Value-added (Is the interpretation new, or is it mainly a repetition of your topic's literature?)	It's both. There is a contribution to knowledge here (e.g. using <i>integration</i> to develop models of public relations professionalism), but a key finding has been the similarity with international findings.
Credibility (Independent of its creativity, how would the most esteemed peers in your field critique or accept your interpretation?)	I have deliberately utilised any and every opportunity to speak with esteemed peers at various conferences throughout the EdD period. I would hope that they would both critique and accept my interpretation.

Source (for information on left hand column only): Yin (2011, p270)

The table above answering questions from Yin (2011) helped in my reflection phase in order to ensure that conclusions reached using interpretive analysis were valid and rigorous.

Limitations

All research is subject to limitations (Yin 2011) and this study was no different. Firstly, generating more data from a wider range of actors could have enhanced my analysis and findings. For example, it would also have been of benefit to have sought data from academics, students and organisations that engage with the PR industry (and in fact, those that do not). However, the limitations of a 50,000 word thesis precluded additional triangulation.

Secondly, it could be argued that another limitation of the study was interviewing only senior practitioners who work at the managerial level of public relations rather than those who work at technician level. These practitioners represented what was noted in the literature as the ‘dominant coalition’ or part of the elite representing the highest levels of management or the most senior politicians. The reason that this is a limitation is because the focus of my study was on the role of public relations in higher education and therefore all entrants into the PR industry will commence their work as technicians before more than likely progressing to a managerial one.

Thirdly, the sample contained a gender skew towards men without formal PR education and women with formal (PR) education. Six men and two women were interviewed without formal PR education and six women and two men were interviewed with formal PR education. This can be explained to some extent by the design of the research, which was to focus on senior PR practitioners. It thus proved more difficult to find women without formal PR education at senior level in Ireland. This can possibly be explained by research which has found that practitioners with 25-35 years of experience are more likely to be men (Macnamara, 2014).

It is worth noting that the participants were all caucasian and from upper middle class backgrounds. Although Ireland is not as multicultural as other countries, for example, the UK – it could be argued that the absence of multi-cultural perspectives on the management of relationships may negatively affect the pursuit of global interests. Although attempts were

made to choose from a more diverse background, there was not a more heterogenic pool of practitioners from which to choose from. However, given the changing nature of the cultural environment in Ireland, perhaps the lack of diversity within the occupation of public relations in Ireland may be an issue .

Finally, although this research focuses on the area of education, attention has not been given in my theoretical framework to educational theorists as such. For example, pioneers such as John Dewey or Jerome Bruner are not embedded into my literature. However I argue that what is important is that my research, similar to what Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) wrote, should facilitate reflection, criticism and a more informed view of the educational process which in turn helps to improve professional practice. Similarly, Sikes, Nixon and Carr (2003) stated:

What distinguishes educational research, is its ‘usefulness’ and ‘relevance’ to those working in educational settings. Educational research is not just *about* education, but research with an educational purpose (p 4).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have discussed the research design and methodology adopted in this study. The reasons for choosing a constructionist/interpretivist approach have been outlined and I have justified the abductive nature of the research process. This was an inquiry in relation to public relations in Ireland. One may assume that an inquiry is linear and involves asking questions of value, observation through interviews with practitioners and subsequently constructing answers. However as noted by Littlejohn and Foss (2011), inquiry does not proceed in this fashion. *'Each stage affects and is affected by others. Inquiry then, is more like running around a circle and back and forth between different points on it than walking in a straight line'* (Littlejohn and Foss, 2011, p9). Similarly, I concur with Maxwell (2011) who noted that the collecting and analysing of data, developing and modifying data and refocusing the research questions as well as identifying validity threats were going on simultaneously, each influencing all of the others. The next chapter commences with presenting the findings from the first research question which focuses on the views of PR practitioners on the profession of PR in Ireland.

Chapter Six

Perspectives on Public Relations as an Occupational Field

This study aimed to achieve an in depth understanding of the role that higher education plays in preparing public relations graduates for entry into the industry. Empirical data was provided in order to offer an understanding from the perspective of senior professionals involved in the public relations industry in Ireland. Given that all interviewees were senior PR practitioners, it was important to get their views on the structure and construction of the field in Ireland.

A reminder that the research questions were as follows:

RQ1: *What are practitioner's views on what public relations is and how the occupation has evolved in Ireland?*

RQ2: *What are practitioners' views on whether or not a PR qualification in HE is considered a pre-requisite for employment in public relations?*

RQ3: *What are the views of practitioners in relation to the skills, knowledge and attributes that graduates have - and should have - when they enter the industry?*

This chapter focuses specifically on the findings from research question one which asked what practitioners' views were on public relations and how the occupation has evolved in Ireland.. The overall theme in relation to this chapter is that of the 'Identity' of Public Relations in Ireland. Hocke-Mirzashvili and Hickerson (2014) proffered that:

Belonging to a group can influence the selection of behaviour and influences the construction, not only of identities, but the self. Therefore, group membership in organisations and the role of organisational and work identities are important (p 101).

Therefore, in considering the identity of public relations, I examine in this section what practitioners' views are on what public relations 'is' and on the occupation of PR in Ireland.

What is Public Relations?

The literature highlighted the many different perspectives that public relations can be viewed from (e.g. Theaker 2012; Fawkes 2010 and Tench and Deflagbe 2008). It was therefore interesting to examine the views of senior PR practitioners on what public relations 'is'. Participants' responses focused on public relations as communications and reputation management with an obvious aversion to the term 'spin'.

PR is about communications

Niall (PRG) believed that PR is the 'oil' in the machine and that PR is a subset of that (communications):

Communications is the oil in the machine. Now, that might be one man's PR and another woman's advocacy and another woman's internal communications, and they all use some of the same tools, but in very different ways.

Although a significant amount of literature showed the diverse nature of public relations, Michael (NPRG) propounded that PR is about communication and that efficient communication requires understanding:

PR is not that diverse. It comes, all of human communication is essentially the same, and now I know that you get all kinds of guys pontificating about the nature of human communication, but really what you're trying to do, I would have thought or, is to ensure that that communication takes place as efficiently as possible, and efficient communication requires understanding.

It's complicated

Ella (PRG) expressed her frustration at the complication of having to ensure that the message being communicated is consistent enough to land on the lap of so many different publics. The evening I interviewed Ella, she was organising an event where the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) was speaking at. She referred to the frustration at having to consider so many diverse audiences when advising on what he should say on the evening:

It's complicated and it's frustrating and you have got a whole load of audiences to think about. For example the Taoiseach is speaking at the IBEC dinner tonight. They are an Irish indigenous business audience but there are also multinationals present. And there are also media there. And politicians. So he has a myriad of people that he is speaking to, and whatever he says, he is going to be interpreted differently...and the people like me who are advising on what he's going to say, we are the ones that need to think about, making sure that whatever he says, that lands with one audience, is not necessarily going to discommode another audience, you know?

PR is about persuasion

One of the gaps that the literature review highlighted was the gap in the reference to persuasion in most of the – many – definitions of public relations (e.g. Hutton, 1999; Sterne 2011). Interestingly, a number of practitioners referred to the importance of persuasion in their everyday practice. For example, Edward (NPRG) noted that PR is '*about persuasion, about explanations*'. Additionally, Ella (PRG) said:

Persuasion skills are where, I think really, people that really stand out when they can convince a client company that what they're attempting to do is wrong and that in the long run, it will damage their reputation more.

PR is about reputation management

Another point highlighted in the literature - and one that has equally come through in the findings - was the spectrum in the perception of public relations which has contributed to the diversity of public relations terminology including "public affairs", "public information", "community relations", "corporate communication", "media relations" and "external relations" (Lages and Simkin 2003). For example, Ella (PRG) who is a senior practitioner in the public sector said that she doesn't use the term 'PR' anymore and that she 'detests' the phrase 'marketing communications':

I don't tend to use the word "PR" much anymore, you know and I hate the term "marketing communications". That cracks me up altogether. But strategic communications or corporate reputational management, I like it. Reputational management to me, because reputational management really is what PR is, be it a representation of a person like a politician or an organisation or, you know, it's managing their reputation.

O'Dwyer (2005) expressed concern about the abundance of terminology that has resulted in confusion in the mind of the general public, which is compounded by the negative connotations nurtured by media commentary on the public relations exercises mounted by politicians and organisations. In turn, these negative connotations lead organisations to consider alternative terminology such as Ella (PRG) above who prefers the term 'reputational management'.

Although O'Dwyer (2005) argues that this proliferation of terminology further confuses the general public, I argue that the abundance of terminology is understandable given that public relations draws on many fields including management, media, communication and psychology (Fawkes, 2012).

PR is not just about media relations

In the literature review chapter, the progression of public relations was highlighted by Grunig (1984) initially concerned itself one-way publicity or press agency. Similarly, Roger (non PRG) noted how there is more of a realisation that public relations is about way more than media relations:

We are now much more about management of stakeholder relationships when it comes to communication rather than just the media. You know, if you say to somebody "PR", they immediately, if they are not in the business, they think "media relations". We are about much more than that.

Similarly, the strategic nature of public relations emphasised in the principles of PR (Grunig, 2009) in the literature review chapter were re-inforced by practitioners.

PR people were 'outsiders' – independent 'fiefdoms'

Edward (non PRG) who spent well over two decades working in the PR industry before being recognised at senior level, described how all the departments used to work independently of each other:

You had an organisation now that's running with independent fiefdoms. They are independent baronies who don't happily regard any people who are not of their profession. (Edward, non PRG).

Similarly, this concern of working independently was highlighted in the literature where Grunig (2009), in highlighting the principles of public relations, referred to empowerment of PR, when he noted that the chief communications officer is part of or has access to the dominant coalition or other coalitions of senior managers who make decisions in the organisation.

PR has become more strategic

Ella (PRG) noted how corporate reputation and communications have become so much more important in organisations now that when she started first:

Well, I think on the plus side, I think it has become much more strategic in that communications is now seen as something which is as strategic and as important as finance, as HR, as operations. I think the whole area of corporate reputation, reputational management, all of that, has become, you know, much more important to organisations than it would have been when I started first about twenty years ago. (Ella, PRG).

PR's evolution as a strategic management function, came across quite forcefully from almost all practitioners interviewed, with the transition from being 'managerless' to now being part of the boardroom being the view of most interviewees.

For example one practitioner (Edward) spoke of the experience of not being recognised by management. He refers to the managers as 'spineless', particularly one manager, who went home for lunch on the day of a crisis in the organisation (that ended up in multiple fatalities) and got his wife to ring in sick after lunch. He returned a week later when the crisis was over. The use of words such as 'managerless' and 'spineless' seemed to hit a nerve with this interviewee but Edward (non PRG) emphasised that it's good to see that all of that is in the past: '*So that's, you know, but that's, that's in the past*'.

Technology helping to control the message

Edward (non PRG) talked about how the introduction of mobile phones helped him to be able to control the message to the extent that when he was reporting on a train crash (with no

fatalities) – rather than the headline being ‘there was a crash’ it was: ‘Steel carriages saved lives’:

.... this was in the late 80s, with the very first mobile phone which was a big clunker of a thing. You had to plug it into the battery of a car, yeah.....But I was able to report from the scene of the accident and go on air and everything on this thing, and that the stories that read the next day were all, “Steel carriages saved lives”, not “There was a crash”

PR matters from a financial perspective – we’ve moved from ‘toddlers to tweenies’

In my interview with Bella (PRG), it was interesting for evidence to be seen as to how PR matters from a financial perspective. Bella referred to the fact that although we still have a long way to go, we have moved from ‘toddlers to tweenies’. Significantly however, Bella referred to the importance the corporate world are now placing on intangible assets:

If you look at the balance sheets of Google and Apple and Facebook and Netflix and, you know, any of those, and now I’m sure there’s probably non-tech examples as well, well there is in the medical firms, the value of the company is increasing more quickly in the intangible area than it is in the tangible area. What’s going up in importance? Things like brand and reputation.

This finding in relation to the importance of public relations from a financial perspective is significant. Gregory (2015) found that intangible assets are now rated *higher* than tangible assets for the top stock market companies internationally and proves that intangible assets such as *reputation, communications and relationships* – the business of public relations – are now more important than ever.

PR professionals pitched at a higher level in companies than they used to be

The literature highlighted the importance of public relations working at and with senior management. For example Tobin (2005) emphasised that effective public relations requires engagement outside the traditional customer, supplier and shareholder loop and as such is

more effective working from top-level corporate strategy. Similarly, Elaine (PRG) was glad to note that the expertise of the public relations practitioner is now being recognised at the senior level that it should be:

The good changes have been that PR consultants or communications experts, professionals are pitched at a higher level in a company than they used to be, and that was what we were always striving to do. PR had to be part of the company's strategy, it had to be part of its business objective, so it was at senior level, it was, it took an awful long time to get to that level.

Speed of turning over news has increased

Niall (PRG) referred to the speed with which PR industries have now to deal with issues:

You know, it might take, there was a turnover time, so the turnover time has changed. Therefore the speed of thought, the attention to detail in a tight corner, all those things, like, the speed at which everything is done has changed the way the business is done. The extent to which people expect to see everything now, they expect, people are able to see, expect to see what's happening globally now. That's what has changed in the PR industry. (Niall, PRG).

PR has now moved 'centre stage' because media and companies have evolved

Carl (non PRG) believes that PR has become more centre stage and no longer the afterthought that it used to be. He suggested that the reason for this is because of the instantaneous nature of media and additionally because senior management are discussing any coverage, particularly the negative coverage at the boardroom table:

I think it has changed quite markedly in that it has become more centre stage, and public relations is no longer the afterthought it used to be, that would be my opinion, and it also, if you like, has earned a place and it has had to work hard for it at the sort of, at the centre of decision-making, you know, and strategy formulation

Expectations of senior management have changed – sprinkle some ‘pixie dust’ to make the problem go away

Edward (NPRG) noted that the senior management in his earlier career days, used to think that PR people could ‘sprinkle a bit of pixie dust’ to make all the problems go away:

One of the problems that existed in my earlier career, not so much nowadays, but it did then, was the expectation of management and boards, that you could make it all go away, when bad things happen, you are supposed to come in, scatter a little bit of pixie dust and it all goes away.

Sitting at the boardroom table

Bella (PRG) talked about how the ‘penny finally dropped’ with senior management in the semi-state company she works in and that this was one of the main reasons why she’s still there – i.e. she is being taken seriously:

I’m in this role nearly, well, for over 5 years, and one of the reasons why I came to this organisation and probably one of the reasons why I’m still here is that there was a major overhaul going on at the time..... and the penny had finally dropped that public relations or communications as we call it here, needed to be at the boardroom table, and that it needed to have a strategic role within the organisation.

She went on to speak about how the PR department were able to ‘shake things up’ when they had the leadership within the organisation to do so:

And so our positioning within the organisation and the way in which we were able to kind of shake things up really...and we have had, I think, a good, significant impact on that.

Similarly, Michael (non PRG) advocated that because PR people are engaged in a communications function, one should sit at the same table as the person you are advising:

The rule is you should sit at the same table as the person you are advising, so if you are advising the managing director, you should sit at the board.

Public Relations as ‘Spin’

As expected, all practitioners expressed their disdain at the term ‘spin’ being associated with public relations. Bella (PRG) expressed her frustration at the PR industry being referred to as ‘spin’:

I think we all have to work really, really hard to overcome that kind of easy cliché of the PR person spinning. I would love to say, “Come in and be a fly on the wall, come in and sit on that meeting and realise how hard we work for all our publics.

Edward (non PRG) also spoke about how the reference to the word ‘spin’ or ‘spin doctor’ is a reference to public relations as it used to be when press agency was the focal point of public relations:

When they use the word spin doctor, they are talking about the sort of animal that used to exist about 40 years ago, or in the thirties as a press agent, you know, they are talking about the press agents of Hollywood and all this sort of thing. (Edward, non PRG).

Evidence is shown in the following quotations of some practitioners associating public relations with the function of marketing. This lack of understanding of the profession is a cause for concern, although it must be noted that very few practitioners sublimated public relations into marketing. In the literature, theorists such as Grunig (2009) noted that many organisations splinter the public relations function by making it a supporting tool for other departments such as marketing, human resources, law, or finance. Grunig (2009) noted that when the function is sublimated to other functions, it cannot move communication resources from one strategic public to another as it becomes more or less important—as an integrated function can.

According to Matilda (non PRG), public relations is a ‘trade, it’s a craft’ that ‘you don’t learn from books’:

I think it’s a trade, it’s a craft, it’s like, you know, you’re a carpenter or a plumber, it’s, you don’t learn it from books. (Matilda, non PRG).

PR is part of the marketing mix

Molly (PRG) felt that PR was part of the marketing mix:

I still think PR is kind of positioned as part of the marketing mix. So it’s actually just sitting in its own little niche there which might and might not have importance. (Molly, PRG).

It is significant that some practitioners who sublimated PR into marketing or who referred to it as a trade or a craft, had formal PR education. This is significant for two reasons. Firstly, although these practitioners have formal PR education, the emphasis on theory and on public relations as a management function was not embedded into the curriculum until approximately the last two decades in Ireland. This means that any formal PR practitioner in a senior role for the past 20 years will have completed more technical training than is the case in higher education courses now.

Secondly, this finding can be interpreted as validating one of the main findings in this overall thesis which is that one of the core roles of public relations located within higher education is to provide a more theoretical depth than training courses which tend to provide essential skills and training for entry into the marketplace.

The findings therefore indicate that although many practitioners focused on the managerial and communication aspects of PR, some had a more marketing oriented perspective. Others looked at the relationship PR has within the societies that it operates in and also accepted the complications of being able to describe what public relations is, given its diverse nature.

Relationships between Public Relations Practitioners and Journalists

Relationship with journalists hasn't developed properly

It was interesting to note the views of practitioners on the relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists. Whilst all were in agreement that relationships have improved somewhat, some believed that the problems that existed in the first place were of PR practitioner's own making. For example, Elaine (PRG) who worked as a journalist before entering the public relations' industry, blamed PR practitioners lack of handling media relations properly for the difficulties in how the relationship evolved:

A lot of the reason for our relationship with journalists not developing properly is the fault of those in public relations. PR people who were dealing with media didn't know how to do it, didn't know anything about what they were talking about, and it was wasting time of the journalist.

In a review of literature in relation to this topic, Sallot and Johnson (2006) suggested that a warming trend has developed in relationships between journalists and PR practitioners. In their research journalists held extremist "love-hate" and "necessary-evil" perceptions of their relationships with practitioners in the years 1991-1996 but in 2002-2004 they (journalists) expressed greater appreciation for and valued their relationship more with practitioners (Sallot and Johnson, 2006 p 157).

It was interesting that Elaine (PRG) also believed that she would have benefited from having a better understanding of public relations whilst studying journalism:

I do regret that I didn't, I suppose, learn more about the PR industry when I was training to be a journalist, you know, and I think it's very good that both sides have more of an understanding about their roles and their interactions because in my time, it was like, "Just keep away from those PR people because they're a dirty word". (Matilda, non PRG).

This finding is interesting and is supported by recent research from Macnamara (2014) who found that senior editors and journalists interviewed for his study suggest an 'urgent' (p 749) need for education of journalists about PR.

Tensions and Concerns about how the PR industry in Ireland has evolved

PR is still sometimes presented as the afterthought

Not all PR practitioners believed that public relations has evolved in the way it should. For example, Bella (PRG) expressed frustration at the way public relations is still positioned as being the afterthought when decisions have already been made.

I think sometimes public relations can be positioned as the thin end of the wedge. It's the afterthought, it's the "We've gone off and planned what we're doing, planned our strategy, we have done all that, and oh, by the way, will you issue a press statement about it, and can we get a photographer down to the thing tomorrow?"

The literature equally highlighted the dangers of senior public relations officers not being part of or enjoying access to the dominant coalition, or other coalitions of senior managers, who made decisions in the organisation (Grunig, 2009).

The frustration from this practitioner at not being involved before decisions are made was most evident during the interview:

And you know, you will see the steam come out of my ears because I feel quite passionately that that's not how public relations should be positioned, (*as an afterthought*) it's not how to get the best out of our skills and our expertise, and that approach just doesn't do justice to the work that we can do. (Bella, PRG).

Similarly, Sally (non PRG) felt that public relations is being approached after policies have been developed:

PR has got out of position in the last few years. It is the "throw it over the wall" profession. We develop the policies here, we develop the products here, we develop the corporate stance here and then we throw it over the wall and say, "Go and make the public or our customer or the media like that" and so PR tends to have a servant relationship where it should have a peer relationship of management. (Sally, NPRG).

The wrong process in PR is being completed

In contrast to most practitioners interviewed who viewed public relations from a strategic management perspective, Sally (non PRG) believes that the focus is far too much on a series of processes rather than on attitudes and behaviours:

The majority of the strategic communications plans that I would see are in my view disgraceful in that they are a series of processes without any sense of what is the desired end result. Wait a second. What attitude do you want out there? What behaviour do you want out there among these publics at the end? It's not like that at all. It is repeatedly summed up for me by the phrase "sending out messages". I despise sending out messages. It's the wrong process. (Sally, non PRG).

Shame to see so many senior people 'opting out'

Although most of the literature (e.g. Waymer, 2014) focuses on the issue of race and gender when discussing diversity one finding of particular concern was a comment made in relation to how a lot of senior practitioners are leaving the industry prematurely. Matilda (non PRG) expressed her dismay at how many senior people have opted out of the industry. Senior people who could have acted as mentors to younger people entering the industry:

A lot of experienced people, not that old, maybe in their late forties, fifties, have opted out. They have taken the package whereby before you have lifers in newspapers, lifers in PR organisations. They have opted out because of, I suppose, the pressures. It's a fast-moving world. It's a whole new world with digital.

I suggest that the above quote is a significant finding. It is of serious concern if senior practitioners are exiting from the industry prematurely because of the *pressures* and the *fast moving* world. Gregory and Willis (2013) wrote about the importance of strategic public relations leadership being put into action where seniority and continuance can help build personal authority and gain the confidence of others. I suggest that this area is worthy of further research and that the expertise and wisdom of senior practitioners needs to be valued by all publics both within and outside of the industry.

The next section discusses practitioner's views in relation to accreditation and professional bodies in Ireland.

Views on Accreditation and Professional Bodies

Open entry to the profession has meant that practitioners do not have to be members of the either the PRII or the PRCA, the two professional bodies in Ireland. Many authors (Bernays 1980; Brody 1984; Brody 1992; Broom 2009; Hainsworth 1993) have advocated that professional accreditation (professional recognition of public relations education courses) would enhance professionalism in public relations. In this section, I note the results of the views of practitioners in relation to accreditation and their views of the professional bodies in Ireland.

Accreditation

A suggestion made by one interviewee was for practitioners to be not allowed to practice in the industry unless they were members of a relevant professional body. Michael (NPRG) strongly believed that no one should *practice* unless they were members of the public relations professional body – the PRII (the Public Relations Industry of Ireland).

Michael (non PRG), who proudly failed his leaving certificate, never went to university but progressed to writing numerous successful books in the PR field and working in politics, believes that accreditation is necessary and that the professional public relations body in Ireland – the PRII - should control who enters the profession:

Well, it's up to the profession. I mean, I have no objection to them seeing somebody and saying, "Gosh, he is damn good at the job he is doing, he obviously understands what he is doing. I think we should admit him to the profession, because he meets the professional standard." But there will, that's for odd bods like me, I met presumably the professional standard.

Michael (non PRG) propounded again that it is crucially important for the industry that entry to the profession should only be through the institute:

It's crucially important for the institute to retain control of its professional, educational qualification, that ought not become the property of any university. Entry to the profession must be through the institute.

Conversely however, Thomas (non PRG) was of the view that the industry is too diverse to ever be able to justify strict accreditation:

I just think that that's the way it's always going to be because people come into this role at different stages in life, you know? And in large organisations, they are looking for people who have some world experience, where their judgement has been tested over time, and you may very well have a PR degree, but actually where you worked before, the issues you handled, the crises you managed are what's important'.

PRCA

Roger (NPRG) suggested that more work could be done by the PRCA in 'fighting the real issues', such as tenders being issued to 20 PR companies:

No. I think they could do a better job however, particularly the PRCA. Nobody actually has been successful in fighting the real issues, you know, like, sort of if you are dealing with government departments and procurements and things like that, and then putting out tenders to 20 PR companies. I think that PRCA as a trade and an organisation, should be stronger than that but it's not.

PRII

A significant cluster of practitioners had diverse views on the public relations professional body in Ireland – the Public Relations Institute of Ireland (PRII). Whilst most agreed that membership of a professional body was necessary, most also proffered that the bodies could do more to integrate with practitioners.

Some practitioners noted how important the PRII was. For example, Molly (PRG) said that she joined the PRII as soon as she set up the PR consultancy and she advocated the importance of being a member of the professional body:

I really firmly believe that being part of a professional body is very important in terms of, you know, moving progression and international trends, monitoring and policing the industry and with ethics and things. I think it's really important.

However, although others believed in the benefits of membership, most did not feel that the PRII was doing enough to advocate for the PR industry. Carl (NPRG) is a practitioner who is an active member of the PRII and recognised that the PRII does advocate publicly on behalf of the industry, but also stated that the PRII needs to up its game and make itself 'more

attractive?:

So we do engage internally, you know, and try and create interesting events, but we also advocate publicly on behalf of the profession, and so it's something, but I think the association is fine, I think that possibly we could up our game in certain ways, but not a huge amount, but we do need to make ourselves more attractive. Probably another deficit is we probably don't talk the profession up enough. We don't spend enough time in talking PR and the profession up enough.

This is similar to a point noted in the literature where Moloney (1999) highlighted the irony of public relations when he said: *'It makes for a rich, illuminating irony.....that an activity which wants to produce the outcome of good reputation and mutual understanding and goodwill for its employers/clients cannot produce that outcome for itself'* (Moloney, 1999, p 25).

Other practitioners were notably negative about the PRII. For example, Thomas (NPRG) noted that he is still a member, but not an active member and that if he was to pay for membership himself, he wouldn't be:

I am a member still, but I am not an active member, and I suppose if the truth be known, if I was expected to pay for it myself, I probably wouldn't do it, because I don't interact with it.

Ruby (PRG) said that she used to be a member of the PRII, but not anymore as it wasn't on her client's radar, nor was it doing anything for the industry or for her:

I was and I'm not anymore. I was a member of the PRII while I was in agency and for many years after I left agency and the decision to leave it because I felt it was effectively doing nothing for the industry or for me. I just find that at the stage where I am with my career, it's of no impression to clients whether or not I'm a member. It's not even on some of the client's radar.

This comment is interesting as it could be argued that this practitioner sees the client's view of the professional body as being a reason for being or not being a member of the organisation. This loyalty towards a client is a concern as a practitioner has to span many boundaries and constantly renegotiate the existence of various types of divisions inside and outside the organisations they represent (Gilpin & Murphy 2010). I argue that this can only be done to the benefit of being a member of a relevant professional organisation.

One practitioner, Sally, (NPRG), exhorted that she was ‘not a joiner’ and that umbrella bodies weren’t needed in order to liaise with academics. I have deliberately put the section of the transcript in here to show my attempt to probe this further, but no further information was forthcoming apart from a response to say that ‘oh yeah, people need things to play with’..

INTERVIEWER: Are you involved with any professional organisations in PR?
PARTICIPANT: No, no, I’m not a joiner.
INTERVIEWER: Ever?
PARTICIPANT: Never.
INTERVIEWER: OK, and do you want to expand on that?
PARTICIPANT: Oh yeah, people need things to play with.

Sally (non PRG) however did not see the PRII as being an essential component for dealing with academics:

I have no problem working with academics, but why would we need the umbrella body in between? (Sally, non PRG).

Matilda (non PRG) propounded that she didn’t see what the industry is doing to address the huge changes in the industry:

I would not be active, I don’t really see the benefit. I don’t see what those organisations are doing in terms of addressing the huge changes in the industry, and a lot of the changes probably are for the worst. I don’t think they do particularly a lot to nurture young people going into the industry either, not that I’m aware of anyway, but that might be because I’m not very active, I have never sought any political or office holder’s positions within those organisations. (Matilda, NPRG).

Doesn’t really do anything for me – I don’t attend any of their meetings

Ódhrán (PRG) acclaimed that he is not sure whether he will be a PRII member next year as it ‘doesn’t really do anything’ for him. He doesn’t however attend any of their meetings:

Yeah, I am a member of the PRII....But so, will I be one next year? I don’t know, but I find it doesn’t really do anything for me, to be quite honest, but I did join, I am a member of it, I don’t attend of their meetings or events.

Bella (PRG) intimated that time is an issue for not being able to attend PRII events and that she was more involved when she was in agency rather than in-house:

Yeah. I would have had probably a bit more involved with them when I was an agency, less so now that I’m in-house, probably as much to do with my time as anything else, you know, I used to try and go to the odd few events or forums. I haven’t been to one in ages.

Similarly, Ella (PRG) said that time is an issue for her lack of involvement with the PRII, but that equally she never found it rewarding, constructive or productive:

But I really don't have much time for that. Well, a, I don't have much time, and b, I never found it very rewarding or very constructive or productive actually. I think the industry, conversely and ironically, is represented badly and poorly by its organisations.

When I asked the participant if the PRII should be better, she commented:

I think it should be better, I mean, as, for an industry which makes its living out of enhancing companies' reputations, the fact that it does such a bad job of its own, I think really begs the question, you know, "Why?" You know?

One participant who is working with a very large corporate PR company in Dublin, in which none of the employees are members of the PRII, noted that she had no particular problem with the PRII but felt that there was no point in being a member as it's not a business development exercise:

It's not a business development exercise to be involved in those organisations. Now, to be honest, like, I never had any particular angst with the PR Institute. They were fine, they were OK, but I don't feel either that you were gaining a huge pile from it.

Niall (PRG) acclaimed that he didn't benefit from the PRII until well into his PR career:

I didn't join the PRII when I left college, I didn't join the PRII when I started working in PR. I never bothered because it didn't have any particular relevance to me, to be honest. Then I joined it as kind of my career grew, and I wanted to network and all that kind of stuff.

Conversely, another practitioner (Padraig, PRG) had a student membership but lapsed after that because he just didn't see the benefits of membership:

I think I had a student membership for the PRII at the start, but to be honest, like, personally speaking, I just don't get the actual value, in terms of, if I was to hand over 200 euros, what exactly do I get out of it?

In providing suggestions as to how the PRII could improve, one senior practitioner, Roger (non PRG) proposed that the PRII should put out its Chairman or CEO more frequently to speak on behalf of the industry:

I can't remember the last time there was an utterance by anybody who was a President or a Chairman that actually sort of, somebody came out and defended something in relation to public relations.

From the comments made above by practitioners, there are clearly discussions and reflection needed by not just the professional bodies, but by all interested parties on ensuring that the professional bodies are recognised as an essential component of professionalism. As far back as 1984, Grunig and Hunt have proffered that public relations can only be professional if one of the traits is being a '*member of a **strong** professional body*' (Grunig and Hunt, 1984, p 64). I emphasise the word strong here, because the findings would indicate that many practitioners do not see this strength.

Views on Ethics

All professionals stressed the importance of ethics in business and of it being a significant part of the education curriculum. In fact, PR practitioners aligned very closely with the literature such as Coleman and Wilkins (2009) who state that public relations practitioners must concern themselves with truthfulness and accuracy. For example, according to one professional, Ruby (PRG), ethics is *'very important in PR because you're managing someone's reputation'*. Another practitioner (Ella, PRG) said: *'If you yourself as an organisation are not acting, you know, to the highest ethical professional standards, then that just discredits an organisation'*.

This tended to be the consensus from most practitioners. For example, Elaine (PRG) told a story about working in a company at one stage in London and at the end of the room, there was this big poster that said, "Who's responsible for ethics in this business?" with a question mark? And in the poster, there was a mirror, thereby implying that all employees were responsible for ethics in the company.

However there was also an acceptance of realism that ethics was not necessarily a priority in some public relations companies. Elaine (PRG) was of the view that unethical behaviour still goes on:

It still goes on. It's where your own personal line is drawn on what is the right thing to do, and what is the wrong thing to do. It comes into most stark focus in PR as what clients will you not take.

She (Elaine) was offered a nuclear plant account in the UK at one stage, but she commented in my interview:

I couldn't do it, I just couldn't do that, I couldn't, but and there were very few others I turned down on the basis that everybody, like a lawyer, people are, everyone is entitled to representation. But because in PR, you absolutely have to believe them, then it's difficult to take on some people, difficult to work for some people that I didn't believe in.

Reference in the above quote can be seen to the relativist position as propounded by Heath as it privileges *'people in society to struggle in concert to reduce differences, to compromise*

and to have opinions challenged' (Heath, 1997, p 60).

However, another practitioner justified having a tobacco firm as a client:

Tobacco companies can be represented by insurance brokers, they can be represented by law firms, they can have accountancy firms. All of these professional services, companies, work for tobacco companies, so why not public relations companies as well?

Carl (non PRG) noted that public relations ethics was not just about which clients were being represented, but also about how PR companies behaved towards each other. Carl has noticed that it has not become uncommon for commercial public relations consultancies to approach a potential client that is working with another public relations company and that these boundaries have become *'a bit more blurred as years have progressed'*.

Similarly, Michael (non PRG) noted that apart from the obvious point that ethics is about telling the truth, he believes in the public relations industry that it is also about treating people in a professional manner and not *'screwing the competition'*.

Social Media

Predictably, all practitioners spoke about the significant changes to public relations spanned by the advent of social media. The findings here are important because they impact on the PR curriculum. For example, Padraig (PRG) referred to the importance of *social, video, analytics and search engine optimisation* being taught on the PR curriculum. Equally, it is no longer sufficient to have press release and photocall writing as the core element of PR writing. As noted here by Thomas (NPRG), rules of embargoes and photocalls are *'gone out the window'* with social media:

I think that the rules of embargoes and press calls at 11 o'clock and, they are just out the window. We have had, we have had press photocalls here and this, they have turned up on broadsheet.ie within minutes. The press release issued for the next day's papers is therefore redundant. It's very difficult.

Another important point made by an interviewee was how the reaction time to a story is now much quicker with social media:

There was a time when I would have said, in the middle of, I would say, the early noughties even, you would say that if a story broke, for example, I used to deal a lot with overseas incidents. If I got a story at ten past the hour, I now had 40 minutes to get to the bottom of that story because I had until the next bulletin, taking if that was on the hour. That time has gone now.

Interestingly, the importance of a term called ‘big data’ which was referred to in the literature (European Communications Monitor 2016) was only highlighted by one respondent who noted:

We have got so much data and so much content, it’s impossible to navigate. We are building in Analytics, we use Google Analytics but we are building in a new data analytics system, which we are currently just scoping and we are building, we are going to be hiring hopefully a digital communications manager, building a digital information hub and integrating the company information line which is the phonenumber that we have for the public into a digital team. (Bella, PRG).

This finding not only reveals the importance of social media related topics such as *big data* to be included in CPD learning programmes, but equally how important it is that social media be embedded across all areas of the PR curricula.

However, it should equally be stressed that when human communication and practices such as public relations are being looked at, interpretations and feelings such as ‘awareness of a product or service, perceptions such as reputation, attitudes such as good will, engagement, trust, loyalty, relationships and behaviour are humanistic and not scientific’ (Macnamara, 2014, p 6). Therefore the focus in public relations should not necessarily be *just* on quantitative *big data* but equally on the necessary inclusion of qualitative research.

Gender Balance

Lots of females but more males at the top

Quite a few practitioners were animated in relation to the gender balance issue within public relations. Roger (non PRG) said that although there are lots of females in the public relations industry, there are very few at the senior management level:

The gender balance is still probably way skewed towards females getting into the industry, but I think at the other side of that is, I think probably the gender balance at the top is probably skewed the other way around. I have never sort of seen the world in terms of male and female, and good and bad, you know, but I think it's a disappointment really.

Elaine (NPRG), experienced some barriers from the business sector. When she was interested in setting up a separate financial division she was told that this would upset the men in the PR department, so she left and set up her own very successful public relations company:

And I wanted to run the financial one because that's what I was doing most of the time and that's what I enjoyed, but the men said no, and they said no because it would take too much attention away from the men.

The bank manager asked me what did 'my father' think?

Elaine's (NPRG) story continued to be even more intriguing when she said that when she approached the bank to get an overdraft to start up her own public relations company, she was asked two questions – none relating to her actual business:

I did a business plan, I went to the bank. He only asked me two questions. One was, what did my father think? To which I said, I'm sure he thinks it's great, but he doesn't know anything about it, and secondly, did I not find that it would be difficult setting up as a woman in business on my own? They were the only two questions the bank manager asked me before I got my, I wasn't even looking for a loan, I only wanted an overdraft which I never used, I never had to use.

Although gender was not a focal point of this study and neither was it probed extensively in interviews, it is an important area and warrants further research in Ireland. The reason why

further research in this area is necessary is because of concerns already noted internationally by such authors as Fitch and Third (2014) who express concern about the impact that the increasing amount of women working in PR - but most at a technical rather than managerial level - may lead to its encroachment on its managerial function by non-PR people (Fitch and Third, 2014). Feminisation means that there will be more women working in public relations, but if they are only working at technical level, given that more men secure the senior roles in public relations management, there is a very real danger that public relations could be sublimated into other related disciplines such as marketing. Interestingly, out of every class of 30 PR learners in each cohort in the Institute that I teach in, approximately 25 are female and 5 are male. Grunig, Toth and Hon (2009) argue that this trend has significant gender-based implications *'as students aspiring to managerial positions will need to be aware of how feminisation of the field may affect them whether male or female'* (p 5).

Chapter Summary

In summary, this chapter explored the findings which examined the views of PR practitioners on the occupation of public relations. Although public relations education has steadily increased in Ireland, it would seem that this has had a limited impact on how public relations is carried out. This is not surprising, given that senior practitioners holding positions within the dominant coalition, are mostly occupied by non degree holders and by practitioners, most of whom have not progressed with formal continuous professional development (CPD). I argue however, that the professional identities of non-graduate participants have not been constrained as they have learnt to see themselves through the powerful discourses that surround them. For example, although many PR practitioners interviewed for this research focused on the managerial perspective of public relations, most practitioners had a more sociologically oriented perspective, that looked at the relationship PR has within the societies that it operates in.

The findings from this research question are discussed in chapter ten. The next chapter explores the research findings in relation to practitioner's views on the legitimacy (or not) of Public Relations education within higher education.

Chapter Seven

Perspectives on Higher Education as a Basis for Employment

The aim of this chapter is to consider the research findings in relation to research question two:

RQ2: What are practitioners' views on whether or not a PR qualification in HE is considered a pre-requisite for employment in public relations?

The chapter is broken down into separate headings based on the coding process of the data using the NVivo software programme. The views of practitioners in relation to whether or not they believe that a PR qualification is a prerequisite to employment have been laid out.

Findings have been broken down into two sub-sections, highlighting:

- *The views in relation to whether or not a specific PR qualification in HE is considered a pre-requisite for entry into the profession.*
- *The views of practitioners in relation to PR education.*

Views on whether or not PR in HE is a Pre-Requisite for Employment

This first part of the research question in this chapter is an important one and asks what the views of PR practitioners are on whether or not PR education is considered a pre-requisite for employment in the industry.

Yes – a PR Qualification in HE is necessary

Higher Education can teach the 'whyness' of public relations

In the following quote, Niall (PRG) suggests that the role of higher education in public relations is to teach the 'whyness' of PR:

.....so I think PR in HE can teach people about the wider context in which PR is a discipline, and you can educate them to that. They might only actually internalise it thoroughly when they get into the workplace and experience it

for themselves, but I think if they know in theory what they are supposed to be doing, if they can grasp the 'whyness of PR' they have a better chance of working out more quickly than if they have no concept of the theory any more than the practice.(Niall, PRG).

This quote correlates with literature where, for example Elliot and Koper (2003) wrote that PR education must be underpinned by knowledge of communication theory, social psychology, management theory and practice so that graduates understand 'why they are doing what they are doing' (p 30).

Develops 'language'

Some participants felt that a specific qualification in public relations was essential in order to familiarise themselves with the language

You need to be able to speak their language, because suddenly someone starts using words that you have never heard of before. Well, you need to know where he is coming from, and also if you are talking back to him, you need to let him know that you know exactly what he is talking about' (Edward, non PRG)

Saves time

It was interesting to note how some practitioners realised that one of the core benefits of PRE was developing an understanding of the theory behind the practice. For example, one non PR graduate commented:

'Oh yes, simply because if they were just to come raw into PR, they could be like us, starting out in the 1960s where there was media relations and very little else, you know, and only learning by experience that, I mean, I would have been nearly 10 years in the business before I realised, "Hold on a second, what we should be doing here is we should be doing a whole range of things including persuasion, including explanations, we should be open, we should be transparent", all the stuff, the good stuff that you are supposed to be, and we should be the facilitators for that.

Edward clearly shows here the benefits of graduates entering the industry having an understanding of '*persuasion*'; '*facilitating*' '*being open and transparent*'. Of course he doesn't argue that these can't be learnt '*by experience*' but as he points out: '*I would have been nearly 10 years*' in the business before he realised the importance of such attributes. A

specific qualification in public relations therefore can save time for graduates entering the industry.

Another senior practitioner referred to regret for not having studied public relations at a more senior level when starting out in the industry:

To be honest with you, it's now at this stage of my career, working in this organisation where we are full of people with Masters and degrees and drawing up policies that I never really, I'm only learning now, I suppose'. (Matilda, non PRG).

Although this quote shows almost a hint of fear about her organisation being full of 'people with masters and degrees', the participant equally appreciates the fact that one never stops learning – *'I am only learning now'*.

Lost at sea without specific PR qualification

One practitioner spoke about being 'lost at sea' if he hadn't completed a specific public relations qualification:

I know that if I hadn't have done the (public relations) educational course, I would have been lost at sea, like, you know, the writing side of things were great. The lecturers were immensely helpful and really gave me a good grounding in terms of how to write a good press release and then also in terms of being able to write plans and you know, gave me the basics as to what are the type of things that I need to consider, so certainly, like, we would always give preference for people with the qualification. (Padraig, PRG).

We're a profession – not good enough anymore to be employing non-PR graduates

We see ourselves as a profession, and once you, when you come out of training for a profession, you normally know something about the profession..... So that's what we're looking for, you know, is that when you would go in, if not, you're going back to the generalist world where you would just be employing arts graduates who are good at English, and that's not good enough anymore because that's not good enough for the agencies anymore. (Elaine, PRG).

PR education gave me a grounding that was very important

Do you know, I would honestly say, hand on heart, I am very glad I did the course. It did give me a grounding and I think that learning and that foundation through higher education is very, very important and I just, you know, I hear people saying, "Oh, sure, they can come in after doing a third-

level degree on History and come into PR.” I just don’t think that works. I really don’t think that works. (Molly, PRG).

Clarity of purpose and focus

One respondent also felt that a Masters degree rather than a graduate degree was preferable. A Masters degree in public relations provides ‘clarity of purpose and focus’, according to one participant, who felt that an undergraduate can provide a broader, more general knowledge than a Masters in PR provides.

PRE provides a framework

This practitioner refers to public relations education as providing a framework from which he/she can work with:

....that’s where the public relations education or public relations experience comes in, because if you don’t have that, the only way you can react is from your own personal experience. If you can use the discipline you have learned at third-level or wherever else, through experience, you will say, “Actually, in an objective way, I’m taking that information and I’m going to give it in a framework to the chief and say whatever”, you know.(Thomas, non PRG).

What is interesting about the above quote from Thomas is that although he intimates that education is necessary, I would suggest that he is referring to education in its broadest sense – note the mention of ‘public relations education or public relations experience’ or further on in the sentence he refers to: ‘if you can use the discipline you have learned at third level of where else, through experience.....’. Although public relations education is important, what I interpret Thomas’s meaning to be here is of education in its broadest sense. As of the world’s earliest educational theorists, John Dewey, wrote in his ‘Pedagogic Creed’ that he believed education is a *‘process of living and not a preparation for future living’* (Dewey, 1897, p 7).

The next section examines the views of those practitioners who believed that a PR qualification was not necessary.

No – a PR Qualification is not necessary

Good writing skills and passion just needed

Roger (non PRG) also said that a specific PR qualification wasn't necessary, but that what he was looking for was evidence of having good writing skills and a passion for a particular subject:

‘It wouldn't matter what the higher education... I mean, I once did a survey here to what everybody's background was, and I think everybody in the company at the time had gone through third-level education, but no two people had the same degree, that people had History and French, and people had, like me, had a general Arts degree and there were people that didn't, but they all had third-level education.

Roger went on to say:

... So I also think, all things being equal, I'd like to see evidence of the kind of the skills that they have, like writing skills and things like that, and I think all things being equal and I say this to everybody, I will, and I probably don't employ as many people anymore directly, but I do sit in interviews, I will always employ somebody who has real passion over somebody who has maybe academic skills. (Roger, Non PRG).

Whilst the quote above shows that this senior practitioner felt that 'good writing skills' are essential, but 'passion' for what they are working on was as important.

Analytical and strategic thinking – you can get them from any educational discipline

Additionally, Sally (non PRG) believed that once a graduate had evidence of analytical and strategic thinking, it was sufficient to gain entry into a PR career:

I don't see there would be. I would take a business graduate, take an ag (agricultural) graduate, a medical or a legal graduate. I don't understand why ... It's not that hard to learn how to do a press release, do you know? If you're bright in other areas, then what you're looking for is strategic thinking. It's analytical, it's all of those kinds of things, and you can get them from any discipline. (Sally, non PRG).

Having strict regulation cuts off 'odd bods who you need to keep'

One participant who is now retired from the public relations industry, believed that HE should not be a prerequisite to PR employment as it cuts off 'odd bods' like him:

...look at my background. You don't meet many people like me who quite bluntly have a broad education, although I failed every exam I sat after the age of 12, and obviously it's a problem with all educational systems, but it's particularly so in Ireland. There must always be another stream. You cut off, I would say, you may laugh at me, but I would say you cut off the odd bods who you need to keep. (Michael, non PRG).

These findings are similar to findings completed in other countries. For example, the results of European research completed known as the 'ECOPSI' project, (European Communication Professional Skills and Innovation Programme) which included partners from the UK, Germany, Spain, Netherlands, Slovenia and Turkey, showed that studying public relations at university level is less valuable than other subjects (Tench et al 2013). Although it was also argued that their findings contradicted public relations graduate first destination statistics - which showed an annual 97% employment rate - they additionally purported that this suggested 'potential dissonance between what the practitioners say and do in terms of recruitment of graduates' (Tench et al, 2013, p 16).

Not just PR Education

This section highlights the views of some practitioners who felt it wasn't just public relations education that was needed. Some tensions were evident in the views of practitioners in relation to whether or not a formal higher education qualification was needed at all.

'An interesting bundle of molecules' but 'I would never know if they got a 2:1 or whatever'

While the following two participants felt that a multiplicity of backgrounds was needed in the PR industry, it is clear that one participant is of the view that people coming from all backgrounds 'but only academic backgrounds' are necessary.

'It will need people coming from all backgrounds, you know, I mean, I'm talking academic now, from all academic backgrounds' (Edward, non PRG).

However, although Edward (non PRG) asserts that the industry needs practitioners who come from a range of *academic* backgrounds, another participant was of the view that formal PR education or even formal higher education wasn't necessary. She gave an example of having one employee who was an 'interesting bundle of molecules' and as an employer she had no idea what her educational qualifications were, nor did she care:

No. If I look at the people in our PR division, one of them would have come through marketing and we would have encountered her in that area and said, "You're an interesting bundle of molecules....She spots people, she interns people... and it has F-all to do with their academic... I would never know, "OK, she got a 2:1 or she got" or whatever....' (Sally, non PRG).

A variety of routes are necessary

Many practitioners pointed to the challenges of having a specific PR qualification as being a pre-requisite for entry into the industry, due to the variety of careers that can span the term 'public relations'.

One senior practitioner said it was as important for the PR practitioner to have a background in the area they are representing rather than a specific PR qualification:

I think it's a good idea to have a variety of routes rather than one. Even if you think of PR as industry, there are so many different types of PR. People end up doing PR for engineering companies, you might have an engineering background can be very beneficial. (Ruby, PRG).

A 'more-rounded' person from HE

Ella (PRG) commented that HE says something about the person and that it shows a person has ambition as a result of completing HE:

HE is a pre-requisite for me. I think it's not just the qualification, it says something about the essence of a person that they aspire to HE. I do think you get a more rounded person - that said, you have to look at the individual as well because working in PR, you learn a lot on the job itself. I'm never too particular about the nuts and bolts because that has to be learnt on the job itself.

World experience where judgement has been tested over time

It's so diverseand in large organisations, they are looking for people who have some world experience, where their judgement has been tested over time, and you may very well have a PR degree, but actually where you worked before, the issues you handled, the Olympics, the crises you managed. (Thomas, non PRG).

Views on Higher Education

It was therefore interesting to probe practitioners' views further in relation to higher education. These views are highlighted here.

HE enables 'like-minded' people to talk to each other

The following quote from a senior public relations practitioner who has HE but no formal public relations qualification believes that HE is vital, simply because it enables like-minded people to talk to each other:

I think now, I would say, I think it's vital. I remember talking to a former Head of Business Studies in Trinity at one stage about it, and he said, having a college education, it wasn't about what you actually knew at the end. But he said, "Somehow", and he didn't mean it in any sort of, you know, being snobby sort of thing, but he said, you know, "What it did do was it enabled like-minded people to talk to each other." (Roger, non PRG).

Roger went on further to suggest that a higher educational qualification doesn't mean knowing it all:

The thing you find out, I think, when you go to college is you think you come out as a genius, and you suddenly realise that, you don't know very much.

HE matters

Niall (PRG) noted a significant difference at senior level between those who had – and who had not – a higher education qualification:

Even though those without a higher educational qualification were very, very good tactically, and would have a good name for tactical delivery of mainly consumer related PR activity, when it came to actually dealing with people at an intellectual level or around strategic issues, and managing serious strategic issues, they were not able, in my judgement, to play that level, and they were not rated by the clients that we were dealing with as being capable.

Similarly, in the following quote, the practitioner refers to how HE (at level 8) helps the student to 'understand, to interpret, to analyse...':-

..... I do not believe that it is possible to survive at a kind of an advisory/management level in the PR industry without having at least a Level

8 because it's the intellectual capacity to organise your thoughts, to understand the abstract, to interpret, to analyse, to present ideas back to people, to co-ordinate ideas. That ability which is defined by a degree is then the basic level of ability I think you need to be an advisor.(Niall, PRG).

HE is necessary

One of the respondents who was a former news editor turned senior PR practitioner felt that HE is just part and parcel of the way the world is now as it's part of the system:

It's nearly necessary now. I think if you didn't have a degree, a third-level degree, you're, I don't think any PR company would entertain a CV. I think higher education, it's very important I think for any young person going out there whether they are chasing a career in PR or media or otherwise (Matilda, non PRG).

HE sharpens the mind

Roger (non PRG) was of the view that although young adults without HE were 'bright', but that HE provides a sharpness of the mind:-

.....higher education, I think it helps sharpen people's minds (Roger PRG)

However, not all practitioners were of the view that higher education was of value. Some of these views are highlighted in the next section.

The Challenges in Higher Education

The 'hardwiring' of learning is lost due to technology in higher education

One senior practitioner expressed concern about underlying education principles being lost with the use of technology:

‘I do think that the underlying principles around why education is done in a particular way, have been lost in the rush to do things in a more technically advanced way’ (Niall, PRG).

Niall concludes that the ‘unintended’ consequence of this use of technology is a diminished ability to listen, to articulate thoughts - most importantly for the public relations profession – a diminished ability to ‘write’:-

.....but what we’re losing is some of the underlying hardwiring of learning, which means that the consequence, the unintended consequence of that is a poorer ability to comprehend, just a diminished ability to listen, a diminished ability to articulate thoughts, and a diminished ability to write which is ultimately the manifestation on paper or on a screen of those thoughts.

So I do think that something along the line has been missed.... there is a connection between poor writing and poor comprehension and poor listening, poor ability to communicate at a basic human level. So there are principles and there is hardwiring in the education system that leads to that that’s been lost. (Niall, PRG).

Views on CPD

Some practitioners that did not get a chance to study theory in any formal educational setting are doing so now within the workplace in a learning environment. For example the following quote from Padraig shows how he is enjoying learning relevant theories now whilst in the practice:

I'm fortunate working here at (*company name*) because there are people who are serious heavyweights in terms of, just talking about how they see PR developing and different kind of little models and stuff that they are actually creating themselves. (Padraig, PRG).

Clearly, this PR company is at the forefront of ensuring that theory is practiced within the industry. However, this is not the case with most companies which will be probed further when looking in more detail at practitioners' views of 'theory'.

Similarly, Molly was of the view that CPD is essential for all employees:

There should be, oh, I think there definitely should be. I think in terms of, you know, I do some business coaching, but you have to constantly do CPD with that, you know what I mean? You're a member of the coaching association in the UK or the Irish leg of it, but you have to constantly do CPD to kind of keep up to date, keep abreast of new developments. (Molly, PRG).

However, in contrast, Ella (PRG) expressed disdain at any form of CPD:

I really am a firm believer, and maybe it's because that has been my experience, but I really am a firm believer on learning on the job. I haven't done any further education in any shape or form in the 20-odd years I have been in PR, and I have to say it hasn't, as far as I can see, it hasn't impeded my progress in the industry. (Ella, PRG)

Views on PR Theory in Education

As noted in the literature review, DiStaso, Stacks and Botan (2009) wrote that public relations education is being increasingly called upon to provide strategic, international, ethical and research methods in training and leadership. However, one of the concerns of results of studies to date (e.g. L'Etang & Pieczka 2006 and Tench et al 2013) is on the lack of interest in – or knowledge of theory – on the part of senior practitioners. It was therefore necessary to ascertain views from senior practitioners as to what their views were of theory in public relations.

It is interesting that senior practitioners more advanced in experience than entry-level graduates draw less on theoretical influences than they do on 'common sense' as for example one practitioner who said:

I'm not sure about all this PR theory. There is no handbook that says, "This is how you deal with this scenario".... It has to be based on common sense and experience, you know. (Kelly, NPRG).

Or another participant who said:

No, and I would say I'm not into theory. I mean, I think most of the solutions when people come to me, even still within a year, I'm actually looking at, they have a problem. What's the practical way of solving it? (Roger, NPRG).

Sally (non PRG) was of the view that too much theory is being taught and not enough practice:

They can tell me all sorts of theoretical shit but they don't have a clue about actually doing radio or television or any of that.

Aside from the profanity used by this practitioner, it was interesting that students coming from a media course (and not a dedicated PR course) did not have practical knowledge in addition to theory before they entered industry.

Another interesting finding here was that some PR practitioners who have been formally educated wish that they had covered theory in more detail in their courses – e.g. the participant who said:

The course I was teaching focused on reputation... I went back into all of the academics, so I said, "I'm going to teach them a course that is a practical course."....There was very little change..very little change. (Elaine, PRG).

I was surprised at Elaine's quote above as theory has advanced in public relations considerably over the last two decades. For example, Pasadeos, Berger and Renfro, (2010) noted that the rise in the number of citations in public relations research between the period 1990-1995 and 2000-2005, was 93%. In addition to the increase in citations, Pasadeos et al (ibid) noted that new research and topics have emerged, notably in international studies plus new technologies, crisis communication research and gender studies. Additionally, it was clear from the literature that PR theory is important in PR education. For example, Theaker and Yaxley (2013) argued that although experience and training is good, using theory helps us to understand what works at a deeper level and is vital in enabling us to apply the lessons of experience.

However there were some practitioners who emphasised the importance of theory in PR education. For example, Michael (NPRG) who said:

Professionalism consists essentially of knowing the theory, and the good professional extends the knowledge of the theory.

Another practitioner who was formally educated but not in HE and didn't cover theory in any great detail, expressed a regret that theory wasn't covered in order to develop a deeper level of understanding of PR in his formal education:

Yeah, like, we didn't do anything that involved theory as far as I remember, but, I would have loved to have gotten a far more higher level kind of understanding around some of these things(Padraig, PRG).

The above quote resonated with me for some time and I have used it in many presentations at various conferences throughout my EdD journey. It seems to underline the value of higher education in giving students time to reflect and develop in a supportive environment. I believe that by giving students the guidance and time to be able to value their higher

educational journey and gain a 'higher level of understanding' is ultimately what the role of higher education should be about.

Padraig (PRG) was of the view that it is in a higher education setting that theory is best looked at because students have the time to spend reading and reflecting on same:

A university setting or a postgrad setting or whatever higher education setting that you are in, that's the time to learn about it because you have the actual time to actually read, learn and digest it, so like, I can't speak of any of the other courses because I have only just done the one, and that was ages ago, but I certainly would have enjoyed a lot more of that type of discussion. (Padraig, PRG).

However, the findings show a significant amount of practitioners are not enamoured by theory. In fact, most of the practitioners interviewed had never overtly heard of 'Grunig's 'excellence theory', one of the 'largest category of most cited works in 2000-2005', ((Pasadeos, Berger and Renfro, 2010 p 147). These theories (Grunig/Hunt four models of public relations and the Excellence Theory) are taught as 'normative models and a cornerstone of public relations courses throughout Europe and the US' (Waddington, 2012 p 1).

Views on PR Education

I began this series of questions in the semi-structured interviews, by asking interviewees what their awareness was of the various PR courses that are available in Ireland.

I never knew where all the education came from

One senior public relations consultant, Elaine (PRG), commented on the fact that she was never aware where all the PR education came from:

One of the things as a consultant, when I was employing people for all those years, I never knew where all the education, where all the courses were, how good they were. ...nobody ever came and said to me, “You’re a prospective employer. We want you to come out and have a look at what we do.” They never did that. (Elaine, PRG).

However, Elaine (PRG) went on to commend the Masters course in Dublin Institute of Technology, where the students have set up a website listing graduates interests and details:

The Masters students in DIT have started sending out, “Here’s the people that are graduating this year. This is what they do”. That was super and that’s a great resource. It wasn’t there in my day when I was actually managing a company. It’s there now and all the colleges should have that. (Elaine, PRG).

Masters in DIT

A lot of practitioners are aware of the Masters degree in Dublin Institute of Technology and of the impact that its graduates are having in the industry. For example, Bella (PRG) said:

I would certainly always be very receptive to people coming out of the Master’s in DIT and I think you can start to see those graduates make an impact now in terms of where you look at them within the industry, so I think that has been a good academic development, and I think the calibre of the people coming out of that course are very good. (Bella, PRG).

PRII course

Carl (non PRG) commended the postgraduate diploma course that is run with the public relations professional body in Ireland, the Public Relations Institute of Ireland (PRII):

But I would say to you that the PR, the postgraduate diploma course which is run by the Public Relations Institute now for quite a few years has had a strong

degree of support from the recruiters on the basis that it has given students a fundamental grounding in public relations. (Carl, non PRG).

However, Carl (non PRG) felt that the Masters course in DIT had ‘the edge’:-

...and I would say the Masters course the same. If you were to say to me one over the other, I would say the Masters course has the edge, because you are looking at a concentrated year of good sort of, a very good Masters programme so to speak and it seems to be structured very well.

IT Carlow

Although a bitter pill to swallow for me, the institute in which I am an educator was not high on most practitioner’s radar:

Bella (PRG) said:

I just haven’t seen very many CVs coming from, say, Dundalk or even Carlow, but again maybe they’re just not looking to here for jobs. (Bella, PRG).

Carl (non PRG) commented:

Carlow Institute of Technology, so now I’m familiar with it, I have heard of it, you know what I mean, but I don’t know a lot about it. (Carl, non PRG).

It would seem therefore from the above quotes that awareness of the MA in DIT is to the fore for PR practitioners in Ireland. This is deservedly so but there is also evidence here that all PR courses located within HE institutions need to increase their visibility - particularly the one I am an educator in.

This next section outlines the views from practitioners on the relationship between them and academics in Ireland.

Relationship with PR Educators

Very important – PR knowledge doesn't operate in a vacuum

Most practitioners believed that the relationship between academics and practitioners was one that needed to be nurtured – for example, Ruby (PRG) believed that it's important because 'PR doesn't operate in a vacuum':-

I do think it's really important. I think it's huge. I think that's the academia is so important in terms of building your knowledge about PR but that doesn't operate in a vacuum. It's also so important to build from industry experience and to show its importance to students and practitioners.

Great to give back

Matilda (non PRG) believed that it's great to 'give back' through getting involved in third level:

I think it's great to give back, and I think people who have several years under their belts, you know, it's great that they can give back through lecturing or through getting involved in third-level.

Interestingly in the following quote, Bella (PRG) wants to get involved with third level PR courses, but indicates that time may be an issue:

Yeah, I have spoken at various things over the years and stuff like that and I keep saying at some point, I must do something in this area because I do have an interest in it and I do feel quite strongly about how we grow and cultivate and how the public relations industry kind of matures in Ireland because I think it is still a very young, you know, industry.

Third level institutions need to go make it happen

Quite a few practitioners were of the view that it was up to third level institutions to be more pro-active in ensuring that practitioners were part of academia. For example, Ódhrán (NPRG) felt third level colleges and universities need to build practitioners into part of their programme:

I think universities, third-level educations should go out and get practitioners from the industry.... and I really think across, a full, not just from the communications field, a full range of third-level, I think they should go out and find people who have worked in the industry for years, maybe even still working in the industry and make them, build them into part of their programs or their courses. (Ódhrán, non PRG).

Another practitioner, Matilda (non PRG) felt that guest speakers can add more value to students than hours using a 'whiteboard':-

And I know the first lecture she did, I had feedback, people, students were spellbound, you know, because she had been there, you know, at the coalface, and she speaks very directly and they were just in a trance by her. But that has more value I think than hours of somebody, you know, with their whiteboards and students taking notes.

This comment was interesting as the assumption seems to be that pedagogy in HE involves educators *lecturing* rather than the active learning which is evident in most higher education classes nowadays.

Additionally, Ella (PRG) said that the onus was on third level institutions to start the dialogue:

I wouldn't be against becoming more engaged with third level courses, but I suppose it is not something that I have ever thought about. I think the onus is probably on the education institution, to push that at practitioners and start that dialogue, you know? (Ella, PRG).

Structured partnership

Padraig (PRG) suggested that a more structured partnership should be developed between practitioners and academics:

I would like to see some sort of engagement with industry in terms of what is it that industry wants and to, maybe it does exist, because like, but I have never seen it, but like, you know, what do they want and how can we help deliver that and more kind of structured partnerships. (Padraig, PRG).

Padraig (PRG) went on to say that a structured partnership could result in a 'seamless transition' between college and employment, particularly if academics and practitioners were to work together on an internship framework:

And there's all sorts of other issues around internships as to, you know, again, should interns be paid or not? What's the maximum amount of time that they should be in there? So I think there is a very important role, not just in terms of the actual design of the courses that are delivered and the skills that they need to know, but also in terms of as students transition from education into employment, that the structures that are in place there, you know, to make sure that that's a seamless one.

I would love to be more involved but I've never been asked

Sally (non PRG) said:

Now let's just be very clear. The academics never come to us and say, "What do you need? What are you hiring? What are you not hiring?" They never do that.

Another practitioner, Roger (non PRG) was at pains to point out that he didn't want to come across as 'arrogant' but that he felt he and a lot of other senior practitioners have a lot they could give to PR education:

I would have some strong views on the way PR education is and I think that there are a lot of people who have done a lot over many years, and I would include myself in that and it's not an arrogance, who would be willing to share their knowledge. I'm not expecting to be paid to do it, but I actually think it's nice to give something back.

These quotes are significant for two reasons. Firstly, the views of participants show that the gap is wide between academics and practitioners. Secondly, they show a very strong desire for practitioners to engage with academia – as Sally said: *We've just never been asked.*

Views on Work Placement

In this section, the views of practitioners in relation to work placement are highlighted. Although most stressed the importance of some type of work placement, some practitioners also highlighted the challenges of work placement and these are outlined below.

A number of reasons were cited for the benefits of work placement including making sense of theory, and having an opportunity to see how graduates behave in a working environment. For example, Carl (non PRG) maintained that spending time in the practice helped the students make more sense of the theory:

The theory starts to make sense for them all of a sudden because they have seen it in practice. So I think theory is extremely important in education. People have to know the reason they are doing something, you know what I mean, but the practical aspect of that is very valuable

Thomas (non PRG) asserted that watching how an intern behaves in the workplace is far better than any interview:

If somebody is placed in my office as an undergraduate, I get sight of the individual, sight of how they look after themselves, their decision-making, their competence in various different fields, and it's the best interview I'll ever do with that individual. I won't interview them, but I will have seen how they perform, and whether or not they have potential.

Retired practitioner, Edward (non PRG) said that he *'hired all my hirings from work placement....and all of them are doing well. And they were all, they were all from the PR, they were all from a PR course'*.

However, some practitioners noted the challenges of work placement. The main challenge highlighted was that of the amount of time needed to dedicate to a graduate. For example, Elaine (PRG) noted:

And it's hard for the agencies to agree to doing it, and you know, it's like, taking in students no matter what level they are at is difficult because you do feel a responsibility to teach them something while they are in there, and that takes time, and I used to say to some people, "I would love to take so-and-so in, but I just don't have the time to teach them.

Ella (PRG) said that it can sometimes be a problem trying to take interns because they simply don't have the time:

I have been approached at times, and I know that that's an option for us, but we are so busy and so consumed in what we do that it's very easy to go, "Oh God, we just don't have the time to spend with somebody to bring them along with us."

Chapter Summary

This chapter has examined practitioners' views on education, including higher education and more specifically, whether or not public relations education is a pre-requisite for employment in the occupation.

Interestingly, whilst most practitioners felt that a HE qualification was necessary, the emphasis on a specific PR qualification was not necessarily a priority. For example one respondent said that *'I do think it's important for people to have gone through the third-level system. I don't think it necessarily matters what they have studied'* (Ella, PRG). Findings here would therefore suggest that the attributes a potential employee possess are of equal importance to that of a specific qualification. This would correlate with recent research in Ireland (PRII, 2014) which found that what differentiated a really good performer over an average performer was not a specific qualification but instead their personal attributes.

It was thought-provoking to note the amount of senior practitioners who are well known in the industry who have never been asked for any input into third level public relations education but would very much like to be involved.

The findings from this chapter are discussed in chapter ten. The next chapter discusses the views of practitioners in relation to skills, knowledge and attributes relating to the PR industry.

Chapter Eight

Perspectives on the Skills, Knowledge and Attributes Necessary for Employment

This chapter focuses on the findings specifically from research question three:

RQ3 - What are the views of practitioners in relation to the skills, knowledge and attributes that graduates have – and on what they should have - when they enter the industry?

Firstly, I examine what the views of practitioners are in relation to the skills and attributes that practitioners' think graduates have when they enter the industry.

Padraig (PRG) viewed the skillset he sees in young people coming into their PR consultancy very positively.

There are graduates I have met, young people who are just unbelievable communicators in terms of the skills they have got. It's not just the written word. They are equally adept at creating compelling images, being able to put through, to develop videos and they are a whizz in terms of understanding how social media works and how to promote things and engage with people online.

However, not everyone was of the view expressed by Padraig in the quote. For example, one practitioner Kelly (PRG) was of the view that graduates were lacking 'initiative'.

You know, people come in and they do an internship with us or they are junior staff and you have to, they just don't display initiative in the way that I would have when I was young because you know, you had to, you had to prove yourself, and I'm not sure whether that's just a new mindset of, and maybe that's a feature of all these, you know, well-educated people, but who never did kind of, you know, worked in a restaurant or a coffee shop or, you know, just don't have that initiative.

Probably the most common concern from all practitioners in relation to the skills that graduates have when entering the public relations industry was their concern in relation to the inadequate writing skills that graduates have. The research in the literature such as that from

Stacks, Botan and Turk (1999) also note that the top ranking hiring problems include writing skills and understanding of business practices.

One PR practitioner, Sally (non PRG) was cogent in her frustration regarding the number of ‘illiterate’ third level graduates she comes across:

The level of third level illiteracy I encounter all of the time is shocking. I would normally be rejecting about, I suppose, ten applications a month simply glancing at the covering letter and the CV and encountering an illiteracy as I go. I don’t give a shit what degree they have if they can’t write English or Irish, I don’t mind which. (Sally, non PRG).

Similarly, other practitioners were equally concerned:

.....their ability to write, again woefully bad, in graduates, woefully bad on any level, really bad. (Elaine, PRG).

Or Ruby who noted:

And I just know from talking to journalists that there is some atrocious PR writing out there – desperate and I think thinking like a journalist is important. (Ruby, PRG).

However, another practitioner, Padraig (PRG), felt that there is perhaps a bit too much focus on the written word when the emphasis in the communications world now is on visual communications.

Ella (PRG) was amazed at the amount of graduates she interviews who do not read the job specifications before being interviewed:

Well, I suppose, what do I look for? I mean, I was only, I was recruiting recently and it’s amazing actually how many people apply for a job without having read the job spec, and they come in and they are clearly not able to answer the most fundamental of questions, which all revert back to the job spec, you know.

I thought this finding somewhat surprising as the course I teach on places a very important emphasis on interview, CV and preparation for the workplace, although evidence would suggest that this is not the case across all HE courses.

People think they 'know it all' when they start out

Roger (non PRG) was quite animated about expressing his view that graduates nowadays think they know it all, whereas when he started out, he feels people were more 'subservient':

Like, I think people should get the, now I blame ourselves a bit as well, like, we assume, we hire somebody because there is some spark and we assume, I think, they know more than they know. Maybe we were all more subservient, maybe we listened, and we watched and we didn't want to make mistakes or whatever else, but I think there are a lot of people now, they think they know it all when they start.

What are the Skills, Knowledge and Attributes that Practitioners think Graduates need upon Entry into the Industry?

Skills

One practitioner – Thomas (NPRG) gave an overview of what he felt were the key skills that graduates should have upon entering the industry including the *'ability to analyse, to collate, to assimilate, to present facts'*. Another practitioner (Roger, non PRG) was of the same view in relation to having analytical skills - *I think that people who can analyse, you know, problems, yeah.*

Listening skills

Another practitioner – Sally (non PRG) felt that students have the ability to present, but it's the ones who are good listeners that she wants:

Something that graduates are not sufficiently trained in doing is to be able to listen. Listen, listen, listen, listen. If you say to people, "Are you a good communicator?" and they would say, "Oh yes, I am very good, I present a lot", the ones who say, "I'm a really good listener" are the ones I want. Forensic questioning, and like, asking them to analyse data and mark out, "Yeah, where do we go from here?" The capacity to know what you don't know. (Sally, non PRG).

The importance of listening in public relations was highlighted in literature as far back as 1951 in Ireland. In previously unpublished lecture notes, MacSweeney (1951) presented a summary of his first lecture and wrote:

Listening will often do as much good as talking. Listen not only to customers and the employees, but particularly people who have a grievance. If anybody is going to air a grievance about policy, product or organisation, it is far better that he should tell the PRO about it than write a letter to the newspapers. (MacSweeney, 1951).

In the literature the importance of listening was emphasised – for example Grunig (2009) who noted that two-way, symmetrical public relations uses research, listening, and dialogue to manage conflict and to cultivate relationships.

Communications and people skills

Interestingly, one practitioner (Elaine, PRG) was of the view that before hiring a graduate, one must see them first, not to ascertain whether they're 'good looking' or not, but in order to ascertain what they would be like if sent to meet with a client:

I think that PR is one of the only jobs you can never give somebody without meeting them before. You can give a lawyer a job on paper, from their biog, you can give an accountant a job from their biog or their CV. You cannot give a public relations person a job ever without seeing them, and it's not just what they look like, it's what they sound like, because what they're showing you in the first five minutes is what they're going to show a client in the first five minutes. (Elaine, PRG).

Another practitioner – Kelly (PRG) said that she has seen how it simply doesn't work when a graduate entering public relations is shy or just not simply good with people:

Personality is huge, you know, because you know, it is a very outgoing profession, like, you do need to be the type of person who has good people skills, and I have seen that working against some people who have come into work with us where, you know, they just didn't have the people skills,. You can't be a shy person, you know, you have got to be prepared to put yourself out there, you know?

Look them straight in the eye

The confidence to look at people straight in the eye and not to 'fiddle' around at interviews was important for another practitioner (Elaine, PRG):

Look me straight in the eye and not to fiddle around at interviews and all that sort of thing.

Persuasion skills

Persuasion skills were mentioned by a few practitioners including Michael (non PRG):

The other thing which I thought was very important, if you are trying to persuade, if the message is to persuade somebody to do something, and it can be a negative or a positive persuasion, in other words, "Do it or don't do it".

Social media skills

Whilst Pdraig (PRG) stressed the importance of a four pillar skillset: Social, video, analytical and search engine optimisation skills for students in today's digital world, other

practitioners such as Kelly (PRG) insisted that caution needs to be observed in social media and that graduates need to be aware of the danger of expressing personal opinions on social media when representing a client base where they may be a conflict of interest:

Anybody who is dealing with media on an ongoing basis knows needs to understand how tricky it is. It's not, you know, for the faint-hearted. You need to be careful about how you phrase things, careful about the concepts that you put across because it can be either wilfully or accidentally misinterpreted and the same goes for your interventions on social media and you know, putting a heading at the top of it that says, "Opinions expressed are all my own" is not going to get you out of jail if you have said something foolish, you know?

Knowledge

Knowledge of the changing media landscape

One practitioner (Ruby, PRG) noted that a lot of graduates nowadays do not know ‘who’s who’ in the media marketplace:

I’m seeing young kids who want to get into PR, but they couldn’t tell you who writes for what newspaper, they couldn’t tell you the type of columns in newspapers, or who presents on certain programmes. Things like writing captions, pitching stories, the whole day to day of liaising with journalists, and the other thing I think is very important, I don’t know whether it’s a generational thing or not, but I didn’t learn it on the course, but I think you should.

Another practitioner (Carl, non PRG) noted that graduates had to be very cognisant of the pace of change in the media landscape:

The whole area of the changing media landscape, digital media, social media, and so on and so forth. All this centre-stage, so I think we have to be very, very cognisant of the pace of change in the media landscape.

Continuing with the change in the media landscape mentioned in the above paragraphs, senior practitioners who were not too familiar with social media, equally recognised its importance, but cautioned:

If you want to impress somebody and get into a PR company, it won’t necessarily be me, but I think that having a really sort of a good working knowledge of social media and being very comfortable in that space and understand how it actually works, I think, is really important. (Roger, non PRG).

Language – the dialect of your audience

Michael (non PRG) asserted that every PR person should be fluent, and conversationally fluent in at least one other language, *‘because in this world, and in Ireland in particular, the European Union is going to become more and more important’*. (Michael, non PRG).

Interestingly, however, Michael (NPRG) was also of the view that language doesn’t just apply to a foreign language, but to a ‘dialectic’ language:

You need to know the, you need to be fluent or at least conversant in the language of your audience, and by that I mean, in the dialectic language, the dialect language, not dialectical, the dialect of your audience, and if you're, and it applies, you know, if you're talking to engineers, you need to talk the engineering language.

Similarly, Sally (NPRG) stressed that being literate in the language of your audiences was most important:

If you don't understand the language that you are using, you can run into all sorts of problems. I mean, it's like not being able to ride a bicycle if you want to do the Tour de France, it kind of is a basic. You need to be literate in whatever language or languages you are doing.

Specialist knowledge

Somewhat related to the ability to converse in the language of one's audience, referred to above, Roger (non PRG) referred to the importance of graduates having specialist knowledge of a particular subject/area:

I think they should actually, that they get as much information and knowledge, in the area that interests them whether it is banking or aviation or agriculture. Or it could be the arts or it could be in our case, sport. So somewhere where you actually bring some specialist knowledge to the thing. That's one, I think that's important.

Body language

Michael (NPRG) suggested that perhaps being taught the intricacies of 'body language' may be important in PR courses:

.....some understanding of the nature of body language, I wonder is there a PR course which brings in an expert in body language and says when they lift their left shoulder, that means they are lying.

Ethics

The literature stressed the importance of having ethics on the PR curriculum. For example, Hutchinson (2002) proposed that a rationale for ethics education may be to help students to develop ethical awareness and skills in ethical decision-making before facing ethical decisions in the workplace. Erzikova and Berger (2008) argued that to teach ethics means helping students understand and appreciate different cultures. Additionally, Bowen (2007) noted that those who had no education in ethics could be unintentionally limiting their career opportunities to be promoted into senior management.

Interestingly though, although Sally (non PRG) was of the view that it is important to have ethics on the curriculum, it wasn't the same as when ethics has been 'hardwired' in a person in their upbringing:

I think that if somebody hasn't got a very strong ethical capacity that immediately says, "No, no, no, no, that's not decent or not proper or not inappropriate." I'm not sure that at undergraduate level, you can implicate this. (Sally, non PRG).

Economics

Michael (non PRG) wondered if an understanding of economics should be incorporated into first year introductory subjects such as management and communication:

I think there should be, there probably is a need for some greater emphasis on economics, an understanding of economics. It might be the primary year if you are thinking of it in terms of a three-year university course. That probably the first year should be dealing with things like an understanding of economics and an understanding of management, an understanding of communication. (Michael, non PRG).

Business

It was interesting to note how many practitioners not only recommended students studying business, but also regretted not doing so when starting out in industry:

One should be able to read a balance sheet. You're going into, now, of course if you're only in the two by four who is drafting the initial press release, you know, you're, it's never going to issue under your name, but if you are the actual man advising the enterprise, you need to be able to read a balance sheet'. (Michael, non PRG).

Yes, absolutely. Business management skills, reading a balance sheet, you know, sort of basic accountancy skills, I think, would have been extremely helpful to me down the years, and it's something that I have now, but it has taken a long time. So I think basic business management skills would be very important. (Carl, non PRG).

Case studies

Ódhrán (non PRG) said that a better grounding for him would have been to have studied more case studies:

I have dealt with an awful lot of crises, so more case studies on big crises, and particularly crises that just run on and ran on and ran on.

Some practitioners viewed this question from a critical perspective. For example, Niall felt that knowledge was just vessel-filling and Sally (NPRG) was of the view that not knowing it all hasn't hindered her success.

Knowledge is just vessel-filling

One practitioner (Niall, PRG), challenged the whole area of knowledge and suggested instead that it's what one does with knowledge is what is important:

Knowledge is just vessel-filling. You can get the intelligence, the data somewhere. It's what you do with it, it's how to use it, it's how to manage it – that's what is important.

Perhaps if I had had some financial training because I can't add or subtract but I can't honestly say that it has ever delayed me or you know, inhibited me, you know, and I started (company name) I built it up, working in 17 countries, sold it all for just under 10 million, started with my son this place and started in the heights of the recession. We made profits every year, so I'm sorry, it sounds vainglorious but it isn't intended to be. (Sally, non PRG).

Attributes

One of the most significant findings in this section was how much PR practitioners focussed on the necessity of graduate attributes within PR education. These are expanded upon here.

Common sense or “cop-on”

A pattern was noted in relation to how many practitioners suggested that ‘common sense’ or the Irish vernacular phrase having the same meaning – namely ‘cop-on’ was necessary for entry level graduates into the industry. For example, Carl (non PRG) noted:

It’s a profession about communications, by people who have very, very good communication skills themselves and interpersonal skills, and there’s an awful lot of common sense and pragmatism in the profession.

Additionally, Ella (PRG) used the term ‘cop-on’ when asked about what was needed by graduates:

Ordinary cop-on, they’re never going to make it, irrespective of the letters after their name, or the amount of time they spend studying.

Another participant noted the importance of the attribute ‘cop-on’:

Sometimes the basics are cop-on, as well, like, you know. For example, I had a recent experience, somebody rang up from a radio station and said, “We want to talk to somebody about such-and-such”, and they said, “Yeah.” Now, and I kind of asked, I said, “Who else is on? Is it a phone-in? Is it like an ambush?” You know what I mean, like, get the basics, you know, so I think that, you know, **now as I said, do you need a full degree to teach you that?** (Ódhrán, Non PRG – bold font highlighted by researcher).

The common sense or ‘cop-on’ theme is interesting as it suggests that public relations is seen as a basic task not requiring any special education as noted by the participant above who questions whether one needs a degree to teach such an attribute.

Problem Solving

Elaine (PRG) was adamant that problem solving was a key attribute for graduates to have as it was a key component of what a public relations practitioner does:

In essence we solve people's problems. Whether it's that they're not getting enough publicity or whether it's that their products are not selling enough or whether it's that they are losing their job or whether it's that they have to tell other people that they're losing their jobs.

Passion

Some practitioners referred to 'passion' as being a necessary attribute – for example Matilda (non PRG) said that '*someone who is passionate about their job*' is necessary. Another practitioner (Roger, non PRG) said that it wouldn't matter what the higher education was, but he wanted to hire someone immediately when they showed real passion in an interview:

It wouldn't matter what the higher education... I will always employ somebody who has real passion over somebody who has maybe academic skills.

Curiosity

In the literature, Moran (2016) suggests that all intellectual work begins with curiosity and a sense of 'curiosity' was an attribute that was expressed by quite a number of participants – e.g. '*If you're doing something like agency, where your clients are varied - you have to have a curiosity about a lot of things*' (Ruby PRG), or another practitioner who felt that curiosity is moreso an innate thing and suggested that it can't be taught:

That whole curiosity which is probably an innate thing. You just can't actually make somebody who is not curious curious. But you can't stop somebody who is curious from being curious. In fact, it's an affliction, if you are, I am, like, insatiably curious, but it is an affliction. (Niall, PRG).

Similarly, another PR practitioner felt that people without curiosity should be '*culled out of the industry*':

People who have no curiosity about other people, people who are not fascinated by the group dynamic, they should be culled out of the industry. (Sally, non PRG).

Michael (non PRG) believes that a graduate needs to have a 'broad education' including history, culture, politics:

They need a broad general education, you know....I mean having some knowledge of history, of, having, being culturally aware, having some knowledge of politics ...for a PR person, whether or not they are engaged in giving political advice, if they are engaged with other institutions, they need to have some understanding of what politics really is about, and it isn't a spectator sport. (Michael, non PRG).

Ability to converse around a dinner table

Michael stressed the importance of having a graduate who is able to converse around a dinner table:

Somebody who can sit down at a dinner table and carry out an intelligent conversation on a wide range of subjects, even if he doesn't like to converse, but if he is a PR person, he is probably very much going to want to converse. (Michael, non PRG).

This ability to converse around a dinner table and having 'interpersonal etiquette' was expressed by a number of practitioners, including Thomas (non PRG):

I'm not sure how you include interpersonal etiquette and relationships within the curriculum but it is important. On three occasions in my life in public relations and communications, I have been asked to take people through table etiquette, reception etiquette. Two individuals who were totally sloppy in their dress, and yet they were starting to meet senior management in foreign places. I was asked to deal with them about their table, their table etiquette but also how they dressed. So one fella, a tweed jacket, an egg stain on the tie.... When they do arrive, how do you greet them, how do you entertain them, how do you make small talk with them until others arrive? (Thomas, non PRG).

Fascination with how the media works and helping to shape the news

An attribute that would perhaps apply specifically to a PR graduate that was referred to by one practitioner (Roger, non PRG) included knowing how the media works:

I was talking to somebody yesterday and I just said to them, if they wanted to go into PR, I think you have to be, I think you have to be of a particular mind if you want to get on. Lots of people go in maybe for the wrong reasons, but I was always fascinated by how the media works and helping to shape the news really and I think that's what PR people still do, is to help shape the news. (Roger, non PRG).

Story – get a rush at the ‘smell’ of a story

A number of practitioners referred to getting a rush at the smell of a story and knowing how to tell a story:

You have to be thirsty and interested in news. I’m 20 years in PR and I still get a rush and a thrill a smell of a story when you develop a story and the thrill when you get the coverage you got or the fury when you don’t and if you’re not still getting those rage of emptions it’s jaded and it’s time to do something else. (Ruby, PRG).

Interestingly, Ódhrán (non PRG) suggested that understanding where the ‘story’ is and how to sell that story could not be taught:

I think first and foremost it goes very back to a lot of basic stuff here, common sense to start with, actually a good grasp, a nose for, now, OK, maybe you would say public relations, but a nose for a story, how to sell a story, to understand where the story is. I think that’s something you can’t teach people. (Ódhrán, non PRG).

Confidence – being able to sell and being able to sell oneself

This quote from a practitioner refers to sitting on an interview panel looking for a public relations graduate and she felt that the people that stood out were the ones who were confident about what they had done and were able to express this in an articulate fashion:

I mean, I had 100 applicants for a job recently, and the people that stood out were not the most, the ones that talked the most or the ones who spoke the loudest or whatever. It was the people who were just very confident in their, in themselves, in what they have done, in being able to articulate that, and they had clearly thought about the job at hand and they had figured out what of their experience was relevant to the job, and they were able to sell themselves, so there was also a selling. (Ella, PRG).

Knowing one’s own limitations

One practitioner (Edward, non PRG) felt that an important attribute for any graduate to have is an acceptance that she/he can’t possibly know it all and where one doesn’t have a strength, to find it in someone else:

Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear. As many as the human being can possibly have, but not all in the one person. I had a broadcasting skill. I have a writing skill. I wouldn’t be very mathematical. I need help with structures, if I’m, if I’m structuring a strategy, I will need somebody to actually, you know, create the tree, because I am hopeless at that sort of thing.... So that’s what I mean about attributes, where you, where you don’t have strengths, you find the strength.

Hardworking

Kelly (PRG) believed that the number one priority for a PR graduate was for them to be hardworking:

Number one for me would be hardworking. It's a very hardworking profession, there is no doubt about that, so they have to understand that that's the environment.

Resilience

Sally (non PRG) adamantly expressed the belief that resilience was a key attribute:

Resilience as a characteristic is key for me. Nobody should go into PR without resilience. In a crisis, the PR person if they are any good is actually the person that is keeping the whole thing afloat, who does not panic, who does not get into the thing of, "The world is coming to an end. My career is over" and everything and all of that, who can actually keep it altogether, so you need resilience and you need a strong personality.

So far, we have seen in this section the views of practitioners in relation to the skills, knowledge and attributes that practitioners felt are important for PR graduates. However, in addition what was interesting to note were the amount of practitioners who felt that attributes cannot be taught.

Attributes cannot be taught

According to Niall (PRG), attributes cannot be taught in HE – rather they have to be learnt through experience:

Attributes can be developed, and can be schooled, but attributes are more, you know, show and tell, do as I do, you know, attributes are not lectures, you can't lecture somebody to acquire an attribute. You have to demonstrate to them. You lead by example, you, so that's where employment mentoring, it's self-actualisation, it's finding out things. You know, you can only develop an attribute. You can't learn it out of a book.

Similarly, Sally (non PRG) referred to an American psychologist known as Martin Seligman and particularly his research into 'learned optimism', where she suggested that his research

proved that certain attributes such as optimism and resilience are innate and are not based on any academic qualifications. Sally went on to say that resilience is inborn:

But resilience, I suspect it may be, it may be very close to being inborn. It may be honed by illness or challenge or upbringing, but the fact is that 50% of what we would bring to adult life is DNA anyway. (Sally, non PRG).

However there is convincing evidence in research to show that resilience *can* be taught (e.g. Ungar 2004, Mezirow (2000) and McAllister (2005)). They argue that there is evidence that individuals can learn or acquire resilient qualities, and Mezirow (2000) and McAllister (2005) refer to an educational framework known as *transformative education* which is explained in the next paragraph.

Concepts of transformative education have their roots in social theory which explores and develops concepts and practices to promote social justice and equality. One goes beyond the acquisition of cognitive affective and psychomotor skills that may produce competent workers, and instead uses critical and constructive thinking methods to inspire learners to: *'look deeply into practices, to develop creative ways of thinking, to improve problem –solving skills and to strive to further social good through concerted personal actions'* (McAllister and McKinnon, 2009, p 375).

Further research is recommended into areas such as *transformative education* (McAllister and McKinnon 2009) or Lucas and Claxton (2010) and its suitability for PR education. This is important because providing an effective learning environment for the development of attributes highlighted by PR practitioners in this research - such as resilience, curiosity and willingness to learn - is a challenge we must focus on. Otherwise our strategies will be nothing more than intentions. Any further research should however also examine research such as that from Ecclestone (2012) who cautioned:

...when confidence becomes seen as a cornerstone of 'personal/emotional or identity capital', educational achievement, social justice and human rights, or 'character' anything that does not develop it is, at its best, irrelevant and demotivating and, at worst, elitist and socially unjust, (Ecclestone, 2012, p 94).

Chapter Summary

In summary, this chapter reveals the views of practitioners in relation to the necessary skills and graduate attributes they think should be learnt by PR students before entering the industry. The emphasis shown in these findings on qualities that practitioners think entry level graduates should have are interesting as these qualities define an occupation and thereby the cultural capital in which it operates as observed by Bourdieu (1986).

The findings in this chapter would suggest a mixture of opinion in relation to whether or not entry-level graduates meet employer's expectations. Predictably, most PR practitioners stressed that digital and social media skills are essential requirements for any graduate now wishing to work in public relations.

Some concerns were noted in relation to the lack of core skills such as writing skills, but there was an overwhelming desire from all interviewed to assist in any way possible with public relations education in Ireland.

Significantly, some of the key skills, knowledge and attributes that practitioners are looking for in graduates are those that they find lacking in graduates. Thus, while practitioners tended to agree about what entry level graduates should know and do, graduates do not tend to meet these standards.

The findings from this chapter will be deliberated in more length in the next chapter which discusses the findings the findings from all the research questions and highlights recommendations including a proposed new public relations model to assist in advancing the professionalism of the PR industry in Ireland.

Chapter Nine

Discussion of Findings and Recommendation of New 'IPPR' Model

The aim of this section is to highlight the research findings in relation to the previous literature in this area. I will discuss how the findings illuminate previous research and how existing literature can support the exploration of these findings. As some unanticipated topics emerged through the interpretive analysis, (for example, more integration amongst academics/practitioners/professional bodies), some new, relevant literature is introduced to aid understanding.

Given that this research used an interpretivist approach, it was important that a focus was kept on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the themes developed, not the meaning that I, as the researcher am bringing to the research, (Creswell, 2003). A new model for public relations known as the 'Integrated Professionalism of Public Relations' (IPPR model) that may help in further professionalising the industry in Ireland is proposed.

A reminder that the research questions were as follows:

RQ1: What are practitioner's views on what public relations is and how the occupation has evolved in Ireland?

RQ2: What are practitioners' views on whether or not a PR qualification in HE is considered a pre-requisite for employment in public relations?

RQ3: What are the views of practitioners in relation to the skills, knowledge and attributes that graduates have - and should have - when they enter the industry?

The themes developed from these research questions included:

- The Identity of Public Relations in Ireland
- Academic Legitimacy
- Skills, Knowledge and Graduate Attributes

These will be expounded upon and explored in this chapter. I will also examine whether or not there was a difference in the views between those with and without formal public relations education.

The Identity of Public Relations in Ireland

There were a number of important findings from the research question which looked at the views of PR practitioners on what public relations *is* and their views on the present state of the industry in Ireland.

A key finding showed that the role of public relations from an Irish context has changed from being just about media relations to being part of a strategic management function. This is similar to international studies – for example Murphy (2003) in the UK which showed that the role of PR had changed from being a tool for influencing media coverage to a strategic approach to engaging multiple stakeholders. It should be noted however that L’Etang (2001) cautioned that such an alignment (to management) has implications for the internal structure and culture of organisations.

Although the profession of public relations is still considered a nascent field (Kiesenbauer and Zerfass, 2015), the metaphors used by practitioners here to describe the evolution of the PR industry in Ireland are interesting. For example, we have moved from *toddlers to tweenies* or the lexicon used by another practitioner who said ‘we have moved from *a series of hermetically sealed baronies where each had their own jealously guarded boundaries and they didn’t co-operate with anybody else, and anybody else didn’t co-operate with them*’. The literature also shows the dramatic evolution of PR from ‘*lunch and drinks parties, complimentary trips and attributes this to the number of entrants preparing themselves through education to enter the practice*’ (Elliot and Koper, 2003, p 26).

Most practitioners embraced the benefits of social media and noted the significant changes it (social media) has made to the PR industry. This is in line with a lot of the literature (e.g. Grunig 2009) who highlight the significant benefits social media brings to the industry,

particularly in relation to dialogue, engagement and measurement. Johnson (2009) also highlighted how the exponential growth in technology has impacted the practice of public relations.

However, some literature such as Yaxley, (2015), cautions the PR industry to critically examine the impact of automated technology. Additionally, literature such as that from Redding (2012), a former art director with Saatchi & Saatchi and BBDO, expressed concerns in relation to how technology has resulted in an increased pace and speed to get things done, but he noted it may not be a good thing:

What I have witnessed happening in the last twenty years is the aesthetic equivalent of the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century. The wholesale industrialisation and mechanisation of the creative process. Our ad agencies, design groups, film and music studios have gone from being cottage industries and guilds of craftsmen and women, essentially unchanged from the middle-ages, to dark satanic mills of mass production. As soon as they figure out a way of outsourcing thinking to China they won't think twice. Believe me. (Redding, 2012).

In fact, ever before the term social media was even being used, it is interesting to note how Grunig (1976) argued that *'when organisations become constrained by their technology and knowledge, they also fail to recognise problems and become closed'* (p 34). Perhaps Grunig's statement is more prescient today as the role of the PR practitioner continues to be the practitioner's ability to monitor and manage the message, no matter what technology is being used.

Separately, interesting findings emanated from practitioners' views in relation to gender. For example, Roger (NPRG) noted that although there were far more women than men in the industry, there were still far more men at senior level. The literature is unanimous in its belief that both men and women should be treated equally at all levels but that there is a tendency for women to work at a more tactical level and men in more senior PR roles.

Grunig (2009) believed that excellent public relations requires both men and women in all roles. Additional literature such as Daymon and Surma (2012) has examined - with concern -

women in public relations from the conceptual lens of identities whilst Aldoory et al (2008) examined the gender issue from a work-life balance perspective. The literature review also highlighted the imbalance in salaries between men and women in the work of communications, with women in Europe who are in the same position as men, earning on average €20,000 less. (Buerer-Zuellig, Fiesler and Meckel 2009). This is a serious concern and is worthy of further discussion.

One unexpected finding in RQ1 signals the exit of some senior practitioners from the public relations industry because of the immense changes in the occupation particularly due to the advent of new media and digital technologies. It is argued that this finding is of concern as we should not be losing the expertise of practitioners who contribute greatly to the occupation. These senior practitioners also offer a valuable mentorship for entry level graduates. However, given that this was not the focus of this thesis and the comments were made by just two of the interviewees, further research into this area is recommended.

Separately, one area where there was much diversity of opinion was in relation to the professional body in Ireland, namely the Public Relations Institute of Ireland (PRII). Some of the comments here should provide insights and challenges for the two professional bodies in Ireland. A significant amount of practitioners challenged the added value of being a member of a relevant professional body. These concerns are also noted in literature, where for example Arrow (2015) expressed concern about the many free web-based educational resources and 'how to' guides meaning that many of the benefits of being a member of a professional network can seem threatened or irrelevant. Additionally, Falconi (2015) expressed the view that professional bodies tend to justify their existence by reinforcing relationships with the more conservative and usually less attractive members:

Professional associations are probably necessary.... yet their leaderships tend to have an ingrained need to justify their existence by reinforcing relationships with the more conservative and usually less attractive members. Standards (and codes for that matter..) thus tend to become their very legitimacy. There are of course exceptions, but they usually do not last more than one presidency... and come and go. (Falconi, 2015 p 1).

However, I have personally noticed the significant increase in activities and communications from the PRII in recent years. For example workshops are regularly held which are relevant and important for the PR industry such as briefings in relation to the recent ‘Brexit’ referendum in the UK or in relation to new lobbying legislation introduced in Ireland in 2015.

The findings would indicate however, that the professional bodies need to capture the respect of a wide range of PR practitioners so that they can ensure relevant standards of practice. In the UK, Arrow (2015) noted that the CIPR are falling behind in definitions and descriptions used by professional associations who are giving *reputation* considerable visibility when in reality *‘the relationship, the community and dialogue are at the heart of daily practice for many, many members’* (Arrow, 2015 p 60). Meintjes and Niemann-Struweg (2009) also recommended that professional bodies should have sufficient authority, power and legitimacy to legislate rules and regulations on behalf of practitioners and perform the functions necessary to promote and protect the wellbeing and reputation of the profession.

Thus, the findings here in relation to the views of PR practitioners on the main professional body in Ireland provide interesting insights which should assist the PRII in achieving its mission of *promoting the professional practice of public relations in Ireland and to serving the best interests of people working in the profession.* (www.prii.ie)

Academic Legitimacy

The discussion here focuses specifically on RQ2: What are practitioners' views on whether or not a PR qualification in HE is considered a pre-requisite for employment in public relations? This chapter captured the views of public relations practitioners at an important time in Ireland when significant changes are occurring in the HE environment – for example, the intention to create technological universities as highlighted in the literature (Hunt 2011).

What was significant from the outset was the overwhelming desire for practitioners to be involved in academia, but as one practitioner noted – *'we've never been asked'* (Sally, NPRG). Additionally, Roger (NPRG) intimated a desire to get involved to repay his years of experience in the industry and additionally propounded – *'I don't want to get paid for it'* (Roger, NPRG).

The literature equally emphasises the importance of ensuring a good relationship between practitioners and academics. In fact, Freberg, Remund and Previs-Keltner (2013) recommended that evidence-based practices should involve three perspectives in PR education including the practitioner's expertise, the client's situation and proven research-based best practices. Additionally, Waddington (2013) asserts that public relations practitioners and students need to work more closely together.

Additionally, PR educators need to invest more time in not just inviting practitioners (working and retired) to guest lecture, but equally increased promotion of courses needs to be given more attention. However, this will not be without its challenges. Boden and Nedava (2010) propounded that higher education institutions are now generally managerialist, focusing on areas such as funding streams, performance management regimes, quality audits and research assessment exercises. One of their key points is significant in asserting this concern:

'Educating students is now, to a significant extent, a mass, global corporatized business, exhibiting almost all of the characteristics associated with making cars or providing financial services'. (Boden & Nedava, 2009, p 40).

Most practitioners stressed the importance of work placement being built into public relations courses. This view correlates with academic literature which indicates that courses that offer work experience are by far the best way to find out what public relations is (Commission on Public Relations Education 2006; Fawkes, 2012). As noted by Todd (2014), educators should prepare graduates by teaching them the job skills and professional characteristics prevalent in the industry (p 796).

The findings in relation to work placement are significant as the college I teach in seems to be the only core PR course in Ireland that does not offer work placement. Past students of mine whom I keep in ongoing contact with via Facebook and Twitter are also of the view that work placement needs to be embedded into our three year honours degree (level 8) course.

However, some literature does highlight the challenges in work placement for both the student and the PR practitioner. For example Daugherty (2011) found in her study that students wanted more skill development and hands-on training, while practitioners saw their role as more holistic, exposing students to the PR field. Similarly, the practitioners interviewed for this thesis have noted the concerns such as lack of time and needing students to show more initiative.

Similarly, research such as Berkowitz and Hristodoulakis (1999) showed that one of the problems with ensuring that entry level graduates are not just *technicians* but are also aware of the strategic importance of public relations is if work experience is balanced with public relations course work.

In the absence of work experience, our college runs a 'PR Project' whereby students complete a 'real' project for an outside PR company or organisation and present a full PR campaign to the client after three months of research and preparation. The feedback from industry has been very positive in relation to this PR project and it meets the challenges of PR companies not having the time to work with an intern over a three to six month period. Instead, the work completed is overseen primarily by the lecturer. Additionally, many PR students in our college are regularly approached and undertake community based volunteer

roles to help in promoting charity/club/industry initiatives. However, it is recommended that ongoing discussions need to be held with my department in relation to meeting the obvious demand from practitioners and from students.

The findings also showed that although practitioners want to hire a graduate with a higher education qualification a significant amount of practitioners did not care whether it was a specific PR qualification. This finding is similar to Irish and international research (e.g. PRII 2014, Wright 2011) and it is an indication that things need to change within the PR profession if PR education is to survive. In fact, a cogent comment noted by Wright asserted that:

If PR education were excellent, if the faculty were highly qualified in both theory and practice and if the curriculum contained the kind of up-to-date, cutting edge state-of-the-art knowledge found in disciplines such as business, law, medicine and so forth, employers with entry-level positions would fight over PR graduates in a manner similar to what happens in other occupations. And, it would be the exception rather than the rule to have graduates from other academic disciplines hired for entry-level positions in public relations' (Wright, 2011 p 252).

Separately, practitioner's knowledge of – or desire to – increase their knowledge of theory was not particularly evident in most of the interviews. However, taking an interpretivist stance on this finding, two points should be noted. Firstly, senior practitioners cannot be expected to necessarily know about theory, as eight of those interviewed did not have formal PR education and for those who did, theory would not have played as much a part in the curricula in previous years as it does now. Secondly, I would concur with Schön (1991) who intimated that competent practitioners usually know more than they can say:

They (practitioners) exhibit a kind of knowing in practice, most of which is tacit... Indeed practitioners themselves often reveal a capacity for reflection on their intuitive knowing in the midst of action and sometimes use this capacity to cope with the unique, uncertain and conflicted situations of practice (Schön 1991, pps viii-ix).

Additionally, Grunig's Excellence Theory has only been introduced and cited in the last twenty years. A lot of the practitioners I interviewed were already senior in their practice at

that stage. It seems that the onus may be on educators to develop a language and mechanism to help practitioners understand theory more easily.

Wright (2014) recognised this and noted that even when practitioners do read theory they rarely find the research valuable because:-

- Too many of these studies focus upon topics practitioners rarely care about
- Theory is often written for academic audiences and frequently is difficult for practitioners to understand.
- Much research doesn't get published until months (and even years) after it has been conducted which lightens much of the initial practitioner interest in these studies.

Additionally, Wright (2014) is also attempting to bridge the gap between academics and practitioners by re-introducing the Research Journal of the Institute for Public Relations where the major purpose of this new publication is to help bridge the public relations research knowledge gap between the academy and the practice. Although many public relations educators suggest one of the major values of scholarly research is to advance the field's body of knowledge, Wright (ibid) notes:

.....critics indicate too much of the research currently being published in the public relations scholarly literature is designed more to help educators meet requirements of their employment with various universities. At most universities, decisions ranging all the way from annual raises to promotion and tenure are based in a large part upon a professor's publication record. This often results in research being designed, conducted and published for academic audiences at the expense of practical ones. (Wright, 2014, p 1).

Furthermore, academics may need to be cautious about being over-reliant on teaching Grunig's four models of public relations. Heath (2001) and Holtzhausen (2002) criticise academics in general for over-reliance on Grunig's management theories and excellence study. Cheney (2001) urges scholars to expand their conceptual framework. Additionally, Moloney (1997) noted that although Grunig can be 'justifiably nominated as the founding father of modern public relations theory' (p 142), he too criticises academics over-reliance on the four models of Public Relations. He argues that a shift away from teaching public relations as a science perspective and towards a political studies one could lead to a better

connection with modern thinking about persuasive information flows in modern, liberal, industrialised societies.

Skills, Knowledge and Graduate Attributes

It was clear that writing skills were of immense concern to all practitioners. For example, Defazio et al (2010) noted: *'the majority of students do not possess the skills necessary to effectively communicate in a written format that will enable them to become successful upon graduation'* (p 34). Another study by Kim and Johnson (2009) found that *the* most important skill for PR practitioners to possess is the most basic communication skill – clear writing for intended audiences. Additionally, Wilcox and Nolte (1997) asserted that writing is the most essential skill for all public relations work. In fact, Tench (2003) stressed:

Writing is one of the foundations of a successful public relations practitioner and the ability to communicate messages clearly and concisely is one of their differentiating skills. (Tench, 2003 p 139).

The practitioners interviewed in this study expressed disdain at the writing skills of PR graduates:

The level of third level illiteracy I encounter all of the time is shocking. (Sally, NPRG).

.....their ability to write, again woefully bad, in graduates, woefully bad on any level, really bad. (Elaine, PRG).

And I just know from talking to journalists that there is some atrocious PR writing out there – desperate and I think you've an important – thinking like a journalist is important. (Ruby, PRG).

Thus, the findings from practitioners reflect the findings from literature reviewed. To be fair, this is not an issue just confined to PR graduates. Writing is an issue across the board in higher education and as noted by Lea and Street (1998) many academic staff claim that students can no longer write.

Todd (2009) recommended that practitioners should work closely with educators to develop writing assignments and assessment measures to help students learn how to write clear messages targeted toward publics using current technology. Although this warrants further

research and discussion, it is worth noting here that although writing skills are embedded across the PR syllabi on the course I teach in, a separate module called ‘Research and Writing Skills’ has been implemented on *all* courses in our Institute in the past few years, to reflect this very serious concern.

Separately, as expected, much emphasis was placed on social media skills with one practitioner referring to the ‘four pillar skillset’ of video, social, analytical and search engine optimisation skills. The literature (e.g. Alexander, 2004) also recommended that the PR curriculum should focus on a range of specialist technological skills include database management, creating engaging and interactive websites, understanding software and being able to conduct online research. Some practitioners interviewed for this research emphasised the importance of *business* being included on the PR curricula. For example, Carl (NPRG) expressed a regret that he didn’t realise how important it was to understand the nature of business with the occupation of public relations:

Yes, absolutely. Business management skills, reading a balance sheet, you know, sort of basic accountancy skills, I think, would have been extremely helpful to me down the years, and it’s something that I have now, but it has taken a long time. So I think basic business management skills would be very important. (Carl, non PRG).

This was also emphasised in recent research by Neill and Schauster (2015) who suggested that business education should consist of reading financial documents, budgeting, applying business vocabulary and understanding the challenges of business. Additionally, Ragas, Uysal and Culp (2015) also found in their study that senior communication executives place high importance on business acumen, but they also stressed that practitioners should consider devoting more time to working with educators and academic associations if they expect more business acumen from graduates (p 380).

Separately, although these findings are similar to literature in Ireland and internationally, (e.g. PRII 2014; Smith 2013; DiStaso, Stacks and Botan 2009; Fawkes and Tench 2004), it was interesting that some skills, knowledge and attributes are unique to Ireland. For example, the

emphasis on learning ‘body language skills’ and ‘learning how to converse around a dinner table’ are worthy of further discussion and exploration.

PR practitioners were more aware of the challenges for PR educators given the rapid pace of changes in technology and specified more of an emphasis on developing attributes such as a ‘sense of curiosity’ and a ‘willingness to learn’.

What was probably most interesting in relation to the findings from this chapter was the fact that most practitioners stressed the importance of *graduate attributes* for an entry-level graduate rather than a specific *skillset* for entry into a public relations career. Of course practitioners did bemoan the lack of good writing skills, but the overall emphasis was on the development of attributes such as ‘confidence’, ‘resilience’ ‘cop-on’, ‘common sense’ and ‘passion’.

The literature also stressed the development of graduate attributes in higher education but the question pivots on whether or not these attributes can be taught. The findings are similar to international research. For example Fitch (2014) found that:

The ideal curriculum offered both a broad education as well as expertise in public relations, suggesting university led PR education served to not only introduce students to theory and practice of PR, but to also develop their intellectual problem solving skills through a well-rounded education (Fitch, 2014 p 627).

The literature review chapter has already highlighted a concern that higher education institutions have yet to develop teaching and learning strategies that can both support graduate attributes and provide evidence of their achievement through appropriate criteria and standards (Barrie 2005).

Additionally, Barrie’s (2004) *graduate attribute* framework highlighted in the literature could be used as a base for further discussion amongst PR academics, practitioners and professional bodies towards developing a specific graduate attributes PR framework for PR education.

Of course there are concerns in relation to graduate attributes in higher education. For example, Boden and Nedava (2010), suggest that the ongoing neoliberalisation of higher education has resulted in employability being a performative function of universities, shaped and directed by the State. It is argued however that rather than produce docile employees, that the inclusion of development of graduate attributes, as well as an emphasis on a specific skillset, may be important in producing employers/leaders from higher education.

However, perhaps this need not be an *either/or* argument in the sense that any ‘employability’ training in HE does not preclude the role of HE to also include preparation for the workplace as well as HE contributing to ‘*individual fulfilment and the collective good*’, (Cassells 2015, p iii). Given that one of the most stark findings of this chapter seems to me to be the emphasis on the graduate attributes of entry level graduates more so than specific public relations skills, it may also be argued that a ‘public relations employability’ module could be embedded into PR curricula to ensure that graduates are prepared for the workplace. The Association of Higher Education Careers Services has produced such a module called ‘*Crafting the Present for Future Employability*’ and it is recommended that findings from further research into a public relations employability module could be embedded into the PR curriculum.

The literature noted that the skills required to manage public relations are undergoing constant and dramatic change (Chan, 2004). I argue however that any undergraduate education should be set in the broader framework of a lifelong learning process rather simply be an end in itself, (Hager and Holland, 2006).

What this means is that industry wants education to continue to focus on preparing them for employment and for entering the profession , but L’Etang and Pieczka (1996) argue that public relations practitioners must be generalists and develop a habit of flexibility and a sensitivity to different ways of seeing the world (1996, p 11).

Was there a difference in views between those with and without formal PR Education?

Wilcox, Ault and Agee (1997) state that *'any attempt to define single PR type of personality is pointless, because the field is so diverse that it needs people of differing personalities'* (p 80). Be that as it may, some interesting findings have resulted by examining the data to ascertain any difference in viewpoints between those with and without formal PR education.

It was interesting that those without formal PR education expressed a regret about not understanding the occupation upon entering it. For example, Edward (NPRG) who said that he would have saved years of learning if he had undertaken some formal PR education before working in the occupation:

I mean, I would have been nearly 10 years in the business before I realised – 'hold on a second, what we should be doing here is we should be doing a whole range of things including persuasion, explaining and transparency'. I believe an education in PR would have helped me understand the nature of the occupation much quicker'. (Edward, NPRG).

Similarly, Thomas (NPRG) believed that PR education was hugely important:

I had no idea how to put anything into context. PR education puts practice into a framework. This means that graduates won't be like me on my first day pulling my hair out going 'Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, who works where, who does what' (Thomas NPRG).

The above quotes emphasise the long lasting benefits of theoretical depth that can be provided within a higher education setting.

Given the nature of public relations, it was expected that all senior practitioners interviewed would be proficient communicators. This was the case. However, in addition to this, findings showed a number of personality traits in common to those with and without formal PR education.

Similar Traits

Pride at achievements to date

Elaine (PRG) was reminded by her former lecturer at a function she had attended the night before I interviewed her about how she had achieved what she set out to achieve in her early 20s:

I said I wanted to be a director of a company by the time I was 25, and I wanted to run my own company by the time I was 30, and I had, and make my fortune by the time I was 40. And I'm happy that I did achieve what I set out to do.

Conversely, Michael (NPRG) expressed pride in a different way. Michael said that he was an 'education maverick' who proudly 'failed his leaving certificate':

I was an educational maverick, I now recognise, I didn't at the time, one never does and I rebelled at doing the Leaving Cert. I failed it, I'm very proud of that.

Stressed/too old for the job

Some practitioners predictably expressed a degree of stress in their workplace, although a sense of 'fatigue' was evident in some practitioners. For example,

At this stage, I suppose I feel an old dog for the role. (Edward, NPRG).

Autodidactic

Sally, who has no formal PR education, emphasised how important it was for her to educate oneself:

Yeah, I have studied it, yes, I have studied it, what's the word, autodidactic. We would have, I suppose, a library of about 1,000 books on various aspects of communications around PR and I would have read every single one of them, annotated them, kept quotes from them. Yeah. Constant studying and I demand that my people, that they read and learn and develop all the time. (Sally, non PRG).

When Edward (non PRG) was referring to an ex colleague of his (Edward is now retired) – he advocated a superiority in being more 'well read' than that of his colleague who was 'business':

He would have been completely different from me. I am an English Lit man, you know, and he was Business so we wouldn't have, in the past I wouldn't

have seen, we wouldn't have seen eye to eye because I would have regarded him as a philistine, he doesn't read novels or anything like that, or read poetry in bed like I do. (Edward, non PRG).

Opinionated

Perhaps it was to be expected, but all participants tended to hold very strict beliefs on various points made throughout the interview – no matter how controversial – e.g. Sally (non PRG) suggested that most young people don't read any more:

I suspect that you could shorten that sentence and say I'm the first to confess to reading fullstop. Most people including graduates stop reading somewhere between 22 and 26, end of. You can check. "What are you reading at the moment?" "Well, I'm terribly busy and..." They simply don't read. I mean, I'm wondering how publishing continues. I read obsessively all of the time. I read eight books a week.

Differing Traits

Although all practitioners interviewed had strong personalities with a belief in hard work and good writing abilities, the language of those with 'no formal education' seemed to be richer than those with formal education. For example, the level of engagement, humour and 'way with words' from some of the 'non educated' practitioners are given below.

Engagement

One practitioner with whom I spent over an hour interviewing (timeline guided by him rather than me) said when we had finished:

INTERVIEWER: Thank you so much. My goodness now, my transcriber will have great fun. You are the longest so far, 1 hour and 24 minutes.

PARTICIPANT: I should have warned you, I talk with great facility.

Humour

Interestingly, humour seemed to be used moreso by those without formal PR education. For example, Edward, when referring to a political party that he did not vote for (Sinn Féin), he used humour to make his point:

Vote for Sinn Fein and everything will be free. Yeah, and where does the money come from? The Tooth Fairy... (Edward, non PRG).

Poetic - 'A way with words'

Edward (non PRG) was particularly proficient and poetic in his use of the English language. For example, when speaking of his experience with engineers who refused to accept the importance of public relations in the 1980s:

They were independent baronies who didn't happily regard any people who are not of their profession. You had an organisation which was a series of hermetically sealed baronies where each had their own jealously guarded boundaries and they didn't co-operate with anybody else, and anybody else didn't co-operate with them, and it's a wonder the organisation survived at all. (Edward, non PRG).

Edward also spoke poetically when explaining what he was trying to get the engineers in his organisation to understand:

Tell it straight. That's all we were trying to do, nothing more nefarious than that. You know, I mean, you know, waging a communications programme against a government department is something you might think was anti-democratic. But in fact it wasn't, it was in the public interest. (Edward, non PRG).

Why those with Formal PR education decided to choose PR education

When practitioners with formal PR education were asked why they decided to study public relations, one of the reasons given was family influence. Another interesting point to note in this section however, is how one practitioner was deterred from studying public relations.

Family influence

Ruby (PRG) chose to study PR because of the emphasis on politics and current affairs in her family home:

I grew up in a house where my mother and my father were both newshounds. The paper was bought every day, three papers on a Sunday, political programmes were watched all the time. Politics and news was discussed at the dinner table.

Another practitioner, Pádraig (PRG) decided to choose a PR course due to his uncle being involved in the industry and Bella's (PRG) aunt ran a PR consultancy in Dublin.

Although Elaine (PRG) wanted to do law, it was working in her father's pub that inspired her to enter into the world of public relations:

My father ran a pub and restaurant which was very well known amongst the media set, so it was close to RTE, and at lunchtime, all of the RTE gang, all of the advertising agencies, the PR agencies, the newspaper journalists used to all descend there because they did a proper food lunch.....“What do those people do? How are they here all the time?” and he said, “Most of them are in public relations.” So I said, “God that sounds like a wonderful career, I wonder could I do it?”

Resistance from career guidance teacher in secondary school towards studying public relations

It was interesting to note the resistance from Ruby's school when she told them she wanted to study public relations. It was not the school that encouraged these as career choices:

When I said I wanted to study journalism or PR, they (school) looked twice at me because it was a school where students went on to study medicine, engineering or teaching. It wasn't encouraged in school. (Ruby, PRG).

The above point made by this practitioner is significant as it suggests a lack of support at secondary level education for students wishing to pursue public relations. This is important because if practitioners and academics are themselves unable to define their discipline, one cannot expect a career guidance teacher at second level to encourage students to enter the industry.

Anecdotally, I am unaware of any educators, practitioners or professional bodies talking to secondary schools about choosing Public Relations as their undergraduate degree choice in higher education. It may therefore be important to practically communicate with career guidance teachers in second level education, as an important public to develop a relationship with. It is recommended that further research could be looked at in this area.

Why and how Practitioners without PR education entered the Profession

Practitioners without formal PR education yet again cited family influence as a reason for entering the profession. Most however ended up joining the industry by accident, whilst two entered as a result of debating or journalist backgrounds.

Family influence

Carl (non PRG) had an opportunity to formally study public relations, but interestingly, a friend of his father – both of whom were working in PR at the time told him ‘not to bother formally studying’ and to go directly into the industry from secondary school:

My father who worked in public relations, he had a career in public relations so I had exposure to it. I applied for a course. A friend of my father’s at the time, who ran a public relations company with his son said to my father, “Listen, tell him not to do the course but to come and join us and work with us.” (Carl, non PRG).

Similarly, Sally (non PRG) chose a public relations career as a result of her family rather than of schooling:

‘The only thing that was of influence was coming from a highly literate book-loving family. That was an influence. Schooling was a waste of time’. (Sally, non PRG).

By accident

When asked why non PR graduates decided on public relations as a career choice, most practitioners said that it was ‘by accident’.

By accident. I thought, when I was at college, my Dad was a journalist, and all my sort of experience over the years, when I was at college, I was doing sports journalism in the summer... this would go back to about 1970, and PR was really in its infancy...(Roger, non PRG).

By a long accident. I started in the theatre and then went into journalism and from journalism and broadcasting, to media training and to where I am now’. (Sally, non PRG).

Effectively by accident. When I left school, I trained as a journalist with the Cork Examiner, and after my training I then left journalism, or it left me, and I worked for a long number of years managing retail sales and eventually running my own company, making and designing lighting fittings. That resulted in my writing an article for the ESB (Electricity Supply Board) after which a guy from ESB said to me, you know, “You should be in PR” and that’s how I got into PR. (Michael, non PRG).

Debating background

One senior PR practitioner was asked by his organisation to work in the press office because he had been involved in the Irish Times debating competitions:

Possibly by default really, Pauline, because I was in the defence forces at the time... It goes back, I think, to the time when I was an officer cadet and I used to represent the military college in the Irish Times debating. And at the time, when I was asked to go into the defence forces press office... (Ódhrán, NPRG).

Journalist background

Matilda (non PRG) studied journalism and after many years working in that industry took some time out to ‘rethink’ her career and subsequently joined the world of PR:

I qualified in journalism at 19 and I worked full-time as a journalist for several, several years... I always thought and recognised there was a gap for what I would have thought a good active PR practitioner in my area, so I took the jump and I decided to give it a go, even though I was never formally trained in PR. But I think that was compensated by the fact that I knew from the other side of the fence... (Matilda, non PRG).

Again, this was similar to what was found in the literature in that practitioners working in the area of public relations before formal education was in place, came from journalistic backgrounds. For example, it has already been noted that Mr Ned Lawlor was a journalist before being appointed the first public relations officer in 1928 in the ESB. Similarly, Carty (2016) noted that the main lecturer on the initial ten week evening course in Rathmines

College in 1951 was Edward F MacSweeney, publicity manager for Irish Cinemas Ltd who had previous experience in radio broadcasting.

One final interesting point to note in relation to the differences between the two sets of actors is that all of those without formal PR education were members of a professional public relations body in Ireland except for one person. However, half of those with formal PR education were members of a professional PR body and half were not. Whilst the focus of this thesis wasn't to probe this area in any great detail, it could be argued that those without formal PR education see the value and benefits of being a member of a professional body, moreso than those with formal PR education. However, empirical research is necessary in order to substantiate such a statement.

Thus, to conclude this section in relation to the differences – or not – between those with and without formal PR education, a number of insights have been revealed about professional and practitioner identities which differed, depending on formative experience or their 'habitus' in Bourdieu's terms (1977). The unique combination of the interaction between the individual social actor and their social environment is valuable at this time, as new entrants to the PR industry will most likely all be formally educated in PR, or at least in HE.

Based on these findings, a new model is being proposed which offers a meaningful shortcut for practitioners, educators and the professional bodies to work towards an integrative approach to benefit graduates and public relations as a whole.

Therefore, in the next section a proposed new model called the Integrated Professionalism of Public Relations Model (IPPR).

The Integrated Professionalism of Public Relations (IPPR) Model

A new model called the *Integrated Professionalism of Public Relations Model* (IPPR Model) is recommended here. Educators and professional bodies should start working immediately in an integrated and collegial manner in order to ensure that public relations education continues to flourish in future years in Ireland – and internationally. Utilisation of the ‘IPPR’ model developed from this research may be of assistance in this regard. The important word in this model is that of ‘integration’ whereby all four factors included in the model should not act as stand-alone elements. Rather, the integration and collaboration encompassing values/ethics; membership of professional body; body of knowledge and skills/graduate attributes, whereby all are communicating with each other, is highlighted in this proposed model.

The figure below relays the proposed model created as a result of this research. The aim of this *‘Integrated Professionalism of Public Relations’* model is to increase awareness of the importance of *integration* of the four traits of professionalism. The key word here is **integration** as the contents of the model are directly guided by literature on professionalism such as that from Grunig (1984) and L’Etang and Pieczka (2006). The findings from participants were also particularly significant in a desire to be more involved in the development of PR education in Ireland.

Fig: A Proposed Model (IPPR) for Integrated Professionalism of Public Relations

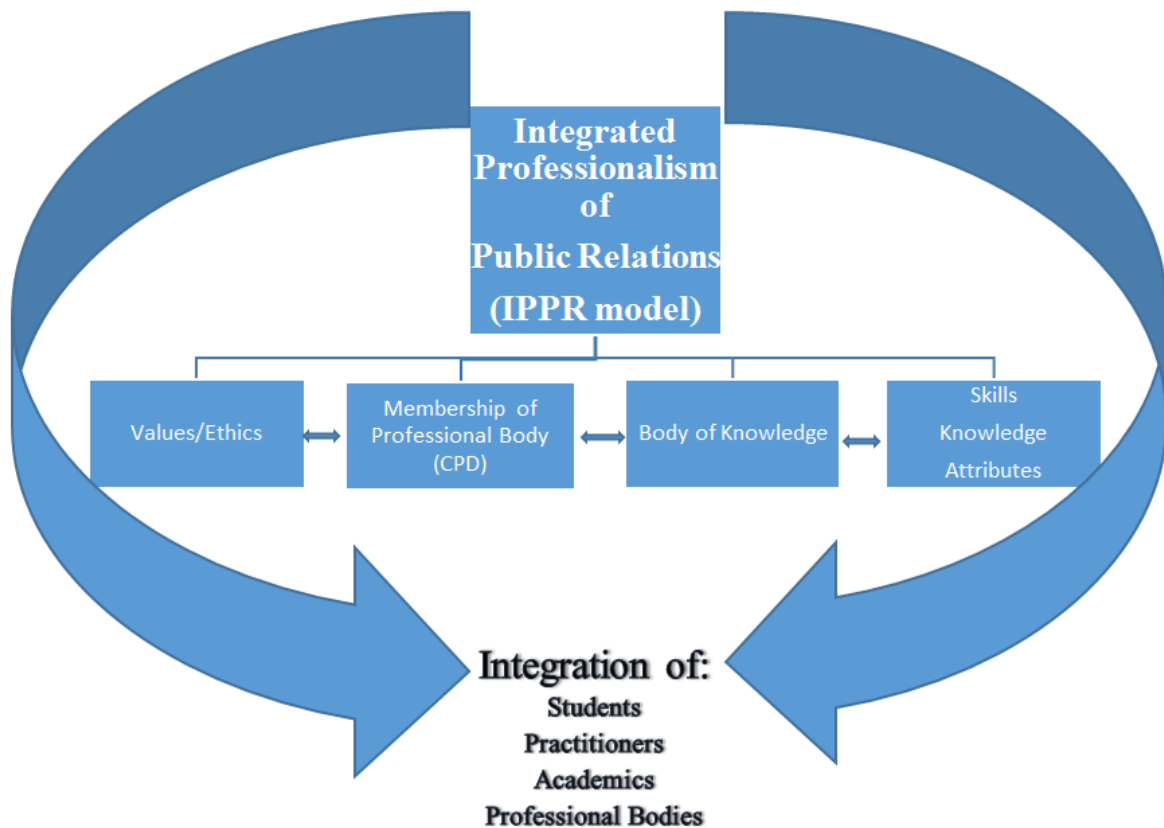


Figure 7 - A Proposed Model (IPPR) for Integrated Professionalism of Public Relations

This proposed model has emanated from interpreting the views of senior PR practitioners in Ireland in conjunction with analysis of the relevant literature in this field. The development of the model is based on relevant literature from various theorists such as Grunig (1984) and L'Etang and Pieczka (2006) in addition to the interpretations from interviews with senior PR practitioners in Ireland. The model emphasises the integrated and collegial aspect of four areas of public relations that educators, practitioners, professional bodies and students should strive towards. These four areas are expounded upon in the next few paragraphs.

Values/Ethics: Van Ruler and Vercic (2004), Grunig (1984, 2004) are but a few of many theorists who highlight the importance of values and standpoints in society. Equally, the literature found that Heath (2005) noted that professions meet the societal need for

expertise and credentialism and that they are a stabilising force in society, protecting vulnerable people, social values and providing quality service.

Similarly, in relation to ethics, the literature showed how ethics is a key part of public relations professionalism. For example, Watson (2012) proffered that public relations shows some characteristics of a profession such as a professional body and trade bodies, aspects of education in universities, a body of knowledge and codes of ethics and practice. Practitioners and professional organisations have also ensured that the codes of ethics internationally recognised by the industry, the European Code of Professional Practice, adopted by the European Public Relations Confederation (CERP) in 1978 and commonly known as the Code of Lisbon, the International Code of Ethics, also known as the Code of Athens and the third, specific to Ireland, the PRII Code of Practice for Public Affairs & Lobbying – are adhered to. Additionally, the consensus from the interviews completed for this research showed that ethics is an important part of the profession, particularly when the industry is managing reputations, for example, as noted by Ruby (PRG), ethics is *'very important in PR because you're managing someone's reputation'*.

The value of diversity within the occupation of public relations was also clear from this research. Brunner (2009) noted that the public relations industry could be professionalised moreso if diversity programmes were to be brought under the auspices of PR departments. However, if this is the case, and I would argue that it should, it equally needs to be important for diversity to occur *within* the public relations profession as well as within public relations education. A specific example of an issue with inequality is in relation to studies that show barriers to the progression of women in PR from technicians to managers (L'Etang 2008) and Berg (2015) noted that many dominant coalitions are made up entirely of white males.

In relation to education specifically, it may be worth probing the work of Hodges (2013), who proposes some recommendations for teaching cultural pedagogy to develop skills for graduates who will be communicating with audiences with diverse perspectives, values and backgrounds (p 28).

Membership of professional body: The public relations industry is not formally regulated although members of the PRII Institute (as is the same internationally) subscribe to the ethical codes of Lisbon and Athens and to the PRII Code of practice for Public Affairs and Lobbying. Many scholars and practitioners have suggested accreditation - i.e. professional recognition of educational courses - as one way to enhance the professionalism of public relations practice (Sha, 2011). Additionally Sallot (2002) noted that 'a PR practitioner's reputation for integrity and competence is their license to practice' (p 164).

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is seen as an integral part of public relations professionalism, but practitioners are not required to complete any formal training throughout their career. In Ireland the PRII initiated a more developed set of annual training opportunities branded as a CPD programme in conjunction with a rebranding of the PRII itself (PRII, 2014). One Master's study done in Ireland by Burke (2013) found that the majority of Irish practitioners have not taken part in any further CPD programmes.

Professional bodies have a responsibility in Ireland to enhance and encourage lifelong learning amongst practitioners. Neff (2010) cites how practitioner-oriented associations such as the then IPR (now CIPR) in the UK and PRSA (Public Relations Society of America) or the Association for Women in Communications (AWC) bridging the academy and the profession, supporting PR research and mainstreaming this knowledge into practice through PR education.

The CPD scheme in the UK developed by the CIPR is worth noting. This scheme aims to encourage members to continue learning by undergoing training at PR executive, account manager, account director and boardroom level (Theaker 2012). The CIPR achieved chartered status by the UK's "Privy Council" in the UK in 2005. The term 'Royal Chartered status' is a professional recognition that is unique to the UK (Tobin, 2005). The process of achieving chartered status includes demonstrating an outstanding level of professional practice and knowledge and a commitment to CPD (Theaker 2012).

A significant amount of practitioners interviewed in this research challenged the implied added value of being a member of a relevant professional body. What is significant here in relation to the importance of integration and communication were the comments made in relation to the lack of connectivity from the PRII. For example, Ódhrán (NPRG) who said:

Yeah, I am a member of the PRII....But so, will I be one next year? I don't know, but I find it doesn't really do anything for me, to be quite honest, but I did join, I am a member of it. (Ódhrán, non PRG).

The findings have already emphasised the importance of listening to dissenting voices as well as advocates in order to ensure the success of professional bodies. What is important here is accentuating the importance of integration and communication across all parties in order to ensure the continued professionalism of the industry in Ireland.

Body of knowledge: Grunig (2000) asserted that public relations is achieving professional status largely because of the development of a theoretical body of knowledge that has conceptualized the nature of strategic, symmetrical practice and has provided practical strategies and methods to implement the symmetrical ideal. Similarly, the defining characteristics of the public relations profession as noted more recently by Pieczka & L'Etang (2006) are the troika of a "body of knowledge, ethics and certification" (p270). Although Ireland has progressed somewhat in relation to advancing theory with the research completed on courses such as the MA in DIT, as noted by Carty (2004), public relations is still in its infancy. Additionally books with Irish case studies are helping in PR academia as well as published academic works such as Hora (2012; 2014; 2016); McGrath (2013) and McGrath (2009), and a practical text book by Gunning (2007).

Significant research in Northern Ireland is also being done by Somerville and Purcell (2011) and Somerville et al (2011) examining public relations strategies throughout the historical period known as the *Troubles*.

Skills, Knowledge and Attributes: In the context of higher education, it seems that the role of public relations within HE is to focus on the 'how' and 'why' activities are done, whereas

professional training courses focus mainly on the ‘how’. The discussion of findings showed that public relations in higher education will need to continue to be more reflective, drawing from supporting theories to help students construct meaning and develop more advanced thinking skills.

It was equally significant to note how strongly practitioners interviewed felt about the importance of graduate attributes such as ‘resilience’ and ‘curiosity’ as well as practical training skills such as ‘writing’ and ‘presentation’ skills. However, the findings clearly showed an overwhelming desire for practitioners to become more involved in academia. This was substantiated in the literature where for example, L’Etang & Pieczka (2006) noted that although ultimately it is the professional educator who should be trusted with the task of designing courses, the opinion of practitioners are a valuable guide to many decisions that educators need to make.

It is good that PR occupations enjoy respect and autonomy, which Grunig (2000) believes are the key characteristics of a profession that public relations must develop and that eventually will allow public relations practitioners to rise above serving only the self-interests of client organisations. But this must be done in an integrated fashion.

Thus, in conclusion to developing this model, I argue that listing each trait as a stand-alone element of professionalism will not work. The integration of all four components is equal to far more than each individual element. The arrows interlinking each trait are also important as professionalism in public relations will only continue to grow if the occupation moves from what Arrow (2015) terms a move from ‘purely relationship management to organisational conscience’ (p 55), where practitioners, academics and professional bodies are all communicating and working with each other in a collegial and mutually supportive manner

In summary, this chapter has discussed findings from this research and discusses key recommendations. These recommendations are not meant to be prescriptive, but rather to stimulate discussion as a result of the perspectives of a cadre of distinguished practitioners.

Chapter Ten

Conclusions and Recommendations

This final chapter presents the main conclusions from the research. Recommendations from the research are outlined and the 'So What?' and the 'Now What?' questions are answered in the context of contribution to knowledge and a consideration of how the findings can translate into future research into the area.

This research focused on practitioner perspectives on higher education as a preparation for employment in PR in Ireland. Specifically, this study examined the occupation of public relations and its evolution in Ireland and how professional practitioners in public relations in Ireland viewed higher education as a preparation for employment in this occupation.

This chapter moves from the discussion of the findings in the serious chapter, to highlighting their importance in the context of objectives set out in this research. The objectives outlined at the beginning of this research included:

- To outline the contemporary history and development of public relations and public relations education in Ireland.
- To investigate the role of higher education as a preparation for employment in public relations in Ireland.
- To ascertain what skills, knowledge and attributes are necessary for entry level graduates into the occupation.

A number of steps were taken in this research in an attempt to achieve the above objectives and to reach the overall aim of this research which was to increase knowledge, awareness and understanding surrounding the role of higher education in Ireland in preparing public relations graduates for entry into the industry.

In order to gain an insight into how public relations education within higher education can support and strengthen to improve outcomes for public relations undergraduates and postgraduates in Ireland, the starting point was to review the literature in the context of the

overall research objectives. The review explored how public relations is defined and unpacked the notion of professionalism within PR. The literature also explored the role of higher education in Ireland. The literature relayed - in illustrative form - a contemporary history of public relations education in Ireland in the context of other societal factors, including key moments in Irish history as well as in public relations in Ireland and internationally.

Following the literature review, a set of research questions were formulated and a series of one to one interviews were completed with sixteen senior PR practitioners. Eight interviewees had formal PR education and eight had not. The reason for this selection process was because many senior participants working in the occupation have not received any formal education specifically in public relations. I believed it was important to get their insights and views about the occupation of public relations and relevant education of future practitioners. The findings were coded with the assistance of NVivo computer software and analysed thematically using an interpretivist approach.

Contribution to Knowledge ('So What?')

Selwyn (2014) stressed the importance of all researchers asking the 'so what?' question in relation to their research and how new research '*adds to understanding*' (p 3).

I argue that the contribution to knowledge includes this research bringing to light for the first time important information and insights on the personal, educational and professional profiles of senior Irish PR Practitioners at this time. It is hoped that this research will contribute to practice as much as it does to theory building.

By exploring the views of practitioners, useful insights into best practice such as key skills, knowledge and attributes, have been explored which have contributed to theory which it is hoped will stimulate some discussion in order to further professionalise public relations in Ireland. The findings indicate that one of the core roles of public relations located within higher education is to provide a more theoretical depth than training courses which tend to provide essential skills and training for entry into the marketplace. The situational context is important – i.e. in twenty years time there will be (probably) no practitioners who will not have formal HE education and specifically, no PR education. The richness of this data therefore is valuable.

Finally, the development of the 'IPPR' Model – Integrated Professionalism of Public Relations, which stresses the importance of all actors working and communicating with each other in an *integrated* manner in order to ensure continuing professionalism of the field, can be argued as being a contribution to knowledge.

Ideas for Further Research ('Now What?')

There are areas which would benefit from further research, especially as it has already been noted in the literature that the field of higher education continues to reform and expand.

Firstly, generating more data from a wider set of actors would be beneficial. For example, speaking to academics, students, professional bodies and organisations that engage with the

PR industry (and in fact, those that do not) would further feed into the findings from this research.

A significant finding from my interviewees was that senior practitioners are exiting from the industry prematurely because of the 'pressures' and the 'fast moving' world. This is worthy of further research as it is of concern to our industry if we are losing such a valuable set of actors.

Another area where further research could be examined is in relation to the *how to* teach graduate attributes in areas such as *transformative education* (McAllister 2005 and McKinnon 2009) and its suitability for PR education in HE. This is important because providing an effective learning environment for the development of attributes highlighted by PR practitioners in this research, such as resilience, curiosity and willingness to learn, is a challenge we must focus on. Otherwise as already noted, our strategies may be nothing more than conations.

Recommendations

The findings from this research indicate that the rapid changes in the public relations landscape such as the new audiences and new channels of media mean that the PR field demands a continuous cross-dialogue across all aspects of the profession.

Increasing attempts need to be made to bridge the gap between academics/practitioners. Academics should encourage the engagement of theory by guiding practitioners to academic publications that make new knowledge available to researchers and practitioners in the shortest possible time and provide fast publication schedules while maintaining rigorous, double-blind review processes, such as the Research Journal of the Institute for Public Relations.

Academics should also continue to increase their own knowledge and skillset by using social media technology such as blogs to post interesting theories that practitioners could use within their practice. Academics need to also have more intellectual engagement with other disciplines (such as communications, political and media literacy), given the broad nature of our occupation.

The pool of public relations academics is relatively small in Ireland and although there are some events where we automatically meet (e.g. the annual Public Relations Institute of Ireland conference), a more formalised procedure whereby academics could meet on a regular basis is recommended.

In relation to the public relations curriculum, discussions should ensue within HE in relation to the location of public relations undergraduate and postgraduate courses. A significant amount of PR courses are located within journalism and media faculties hindering the growth of the profession as media education continues to treat PR as one-way communication centred around publicity and media relations (Wright, 2011).

It is also recommended that professional bodies, academics, industry and students should integrate and collaborate further in relation to improving the public relations curricula in

higher education. For example, the findings indicated an almost unanimous concern from practitioners in relation to the quality of writing skills that graduates possess. Additionally, findings from the review of literature noted the absence of any reference to the 'Principles of Public Relations' in any of the core text books used both in Ireland and internationally. The tri-partite trajectory of Ivy Lee, Arthur Page and Grunig's principles of PR enunciated in the literature should be included in all PR curricula. The curriculum also needs to ensure ethics is included and embedded across the syllabus as was stressed in literature such as that by Erzikova (2010) and Austin and Toth (2011).

Professional bodies in Ireland such as the PRII and the PRCA need to continue to integrate and engage with educational courses in Ireland and develop a core educational department that industry could refer to. Perhaps there is also an opportunity and an onus on the professional body to extend the awareness of the importance of public relations in areas such as secondary level education and particularly towards school principals and career guidance teachers who are involved in recommending career choices to students before they enter into further or higher education.

Public relations education is affected by differences between societies and it is recommended that ongoing integration with international bodies such as the Global Alliance and EURPRERA continue. However, although globalisation plays a part in how PR education is practiced in Ireland, the different characteristics of national stages still exercise a major impact on how PR is practiced.

Mandatory work experience would serve to socialise students into industry practice. Equally, graduates of accredited courses should be immediately eligible for professional membership of the PRII – not having such a facility may suggest university education as being insufficient preparation for professional practice.

Concluding Comments

Public relations education in Ireland has come a long way since its inception in 1951. As a result of completing this research, I have learnt (so far) that as an educator, my job is not just to teach practice, but to also challenge it (L'Etang et al, 2016) and to encourage students to think critically about all aspects of the occupation. Moloney (1998) expressed the view that *'it is not the task of university teachers to be moralists for the disciplines they possess'* (p 3) and although I am passionate about what *good* public relations has to offer, I accept the importance of public relations being looked at from a critical perspective. Therefore, although it is important that the proposed 'IPPR' model of public relations developed in this thesis is discussed - the dialogue, interactions and conversations should not fear of being critical of public relations practice or education.

Much work in Ireland remains to be done. For example, an increasing focus needs to be placed on Irish academics publishing more research. However, as noted in earlier chapters, such scholarship is not without its challenges given the pressures that are now on educationalists to manage large classes and create employable students, leaving little time for research.

Public relations in higher education will need to continue to be more reflective, drawing from supporting theories to help students construct meaning and develop more advanced thinking skills. The influence of graduates on PR practice will most likely have an impact in the future, but this will require a greater understanding by practitioners about the range of skills, knowledge and attributes that graduates bring to the industry. Equally, it will require an understanding and an acceptance from all actors – including students and educators, that continuing to 'learn on the job' continues to be important – even with a graduate or postgraduate degree.

All practitioners provided engaging and helpful insights for which I am most grateful. I would concur with Toth (2002) who referred to PR practitioners as *'insightful decision-makers about what is practical and what is not. They deserve our best efforts and not criticism.'* (p 247).

I would therefore argue that any development of the PR profession should never preclude those with lack of formal qualifications as the personal attributes and abilities of senior PR practitioners without formal PR education have served the industry well in Ireland. As noted by one practitioner - *'having strict regulation cuts of 'odd bods who you need to keep'* (Edward, NPRG).

It is therefore clear from this research that senior practitioners in the public relations industry should play a role in the creation of the public relations body of knowledge that will be produced here in Ireland. As noted by Koper (2004), the value of public relations will ultimately be demonstrated by the quality of the people that work in it. Ireland is no different. Continued investment in education should ensure that public relations receives the academic legitimacy it deserves.

I conclude that the collegiality of all parts of the public relations education 'jigsaw' – including that of practitioners, professional bodies, educators and of course students – are all important in the role they have in influencing the PR strategies that need to be in place to ultimately benefit students – and society as a whole. Having such integration, collegiality and collaboration will ensure a more expansive rather than a constrictive approach in order to future-proof our industry. Therefore, discussion and subsequent implementation of this new 'IPPR' model should commence immediately.

Wright (2011) noted that public relations is in the midst of a revolution that involves new audiences, new channels, new kinds of content and new measurements. Social media and digital technologies are changing the world and work - particularly that of an occupation such as public relations. It will be our success in maximising the new opportunities afforded by this digital revolution that will itself underpin development of both our own professional evolution and ultimately our perceived professionalism by our publics.

We should proceed with haste.

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Appendices

Appendices

Appendix One - Research Approval Letter



**The
School
Of
Education.**

Pauline Madigan
EdD Higher Education

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Professor Cathy Nutbrown

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Dear Pauline

ETHICAL APPROVAL LETTER

Practitioner Perspectives on Third-Level Education as a Preparation for Employment in Public Relations in Ireland

Thank you for submitting your ethics application. I am writing to confirm that your application has now been approved, and you can proceed with your research.

This letter is evidence that your application has been approved and should be included as an Appendix in your final submission.

Good luck with your research.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dan Goodley', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Professor Dan Goodley
Chair of the School of Education Ethics Review Panel

CC Prof Gareth Parry

Appendix Two - Information Sheet for Practitioners

Pauline Madigan
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11 March 2015

Dear xxxxx,

Practitioner Perspectives on Third-Level Education as a Preparation for Employment in Public Relations in Ireland

Thank-you for agreeing to participate in an interview seeking your views on the development of public relations in Ireland. It is one of sixteen interviews with senior practitioners in public relations that I am undertaking for my research for the Doctor of Education degree at the University of Sheffield. This letter is to provide you with information on the research and about the interview. There is also a consent form I would like you to sign which I can collect on the day that we meet for interview.

About my research

My research has two main aims:

1. To understand the contemporary history and development of public relations in Ireland; and
2. To consider the contribution made by third-level education to employment in the occupation.

Little has been written about the field of public relations in Ireland and my research will contribute to a better appreciation of its changing character and its relationship to third-level education and training. In this way, I hope to contribute to the health and vitality of the work of public relations practitioners and their education.

About the interview

The interview will seek your views and ideas about how the occupation has developed in Ireland and about courses of undergraduate education as a preparation for employment in the field.

The interview will last around thirty minutes. At all stages, the content of the interview will be confidential to me (and my supervisor, Professor Gareth Parry) and your identity will not be disclosed. This is to enable you to speak freely and openly about your own background and how you view the present and future development of the occupation.

If, at any point, you need to contact myself or my supervisor, please contact us by telephone or e-mail:

Pauline Madigan: edp10cn@sheffield.ac.uk or 00353879984574

Professor Gareth Parry: g.w.parry@sheffield.ac.uk or (0044) 11 44 114 222 8101.

Next stage

I look forward to meeting you – hopefully on this Friday 11th March. I have also enclosed a consent form which I can receive back from you at the time of the interview. You can withdraw from this research at any time and you do not need to give a reason for your withdrawal.

Once again, thank you for agreeing to be interviewed and I look forward to talking with you.

Yours sincerely

Pauline Madigan

Pauline Madigan
Public Relations Lecturer
Institute of Technology Carlow

To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

Copies:

Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the letter/pre-written script/information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy for the signed and dated consent form should be placed in the project's main record (e.g. a site file), which must be kept in a secure location.

Appendix Four - Questions for Interview Schedule

Thanks for agreeing to talk to me. I am interested in changes in the world of public relations and the role played by higher education in preparing people for work in public relations.

Your way into public relations

1. How did you find your way into the world of public relations?
2. Was your schooling or third-level education an influence on your entry into the industry?

Your work in public relations

3. What kinds of work have you undertaken in public relations?
4. During your time in public relations, how has it changed?
5. When measuring and evaluating a public relations campaign/initiative, is there a certain formula you use?
6. Are you involved with the professional organisations in public relations?

Higher education as a preparation for work in public relations

7. To what extent has higher education become a pre-requisite to public relations employment?
8. Is it important to have a variety of routes into public relations?
9. Do you consider public relations to be a trade or a profession or something else?

Higher education in public relations

10. Are you involved with developments in higher education in public relations?
11. Why should graduates from these courses be better prepared for work in public relations than graduates of other subjects?
12. What should be the balance between theory and practice on higher courses in public relations?
13. What skills, knowledge and attributes will public relations require from future entrants?

14. If you had to do it all over again??

Skills: what practitioners need to be able to *DO* undertake their role competently

Knowledge: what practitioners need to *KNOW* in order to undertake their role competently

Competencies: *behavioural repertoires* or *sets of behaviours* that support the attainment of organizational objectives. How knowledge and skills are used in performance

Appendix Five - Sample Interview Transcript

INTERVIEWER: Now, so I'm with Ella (not real name). It's Thursday the 18th of September 2014. So Ella, thanks for agreeing to talk to me. I'm interested in the changes in the world of public relations and the role played by higher education in preparing people for work in PR. So first of all, about you, your way into public relations. How did you find your way into the world of PR?

PARTICIPANT: Well, when I left college, having done a Communications degree, I really wasn't sure what to do, so I was debating between HR and PR.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you do the Communications degree, was it in DCU, was it?

PARTICIPANT: I was in DCU, yeah, and so I decided to do a course in PR, so I did the postgrad in Rathmines.

INTERVIEWER: A night-time one or full-time?

PARTICIPANT: Full-time, full-time.

INTERVIEWER: Full-time, for a year?

PARTICIPANT: For a year, and that was my springboard, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: And why did you decide to take that path?

PARTICIPANT: Well, I weighed up HR and PR, and I spoke to people in both disciplines, and I decided that probably my skillset was more suited to PR.

INTERVIEWER: Great.

PARTICIPANT: And therefore, that's how I chose the PR route.

INTERVIEWER: So you gave me the answer to the second question, was your schooling or third-level education an influence on your entry into the industry?

PARTICIPANT: No, because actually when I left school, on my CAO form, what I wanted to do was languages, so I actually went to DCU first, and I studied French and German, and then after three months, I decided I didn't want to be an interpreter. I didn't like French actually in the end, I loved German, and I, so I switched to Communications, so I did a Communications degree, so I really kind of happened upon Communications. It wasn't my first choice, so once I had completed the Communications degree, then I weighed up the HR and the PR as potential careers, and I chose the PR and then I did the, then I realised that I needed to specialise a little bit in it, so that's why I did the postgrad.

INTERVIEWER: Right, OK, and the kinds of work that you have undertaken in the industry?

PARTICIPANT: Well, I suppose I started off in, I cut my teeth in agency...

INTERVIEWER: Did you?

PARTICIPANT: Which is something I would...

INTERVIEWER: And consumer, corporate, public affairs, what type was it?

PARTICIPANT: It was, I joined, my first agency was an agency that specialised in agri PR.

INTERVIEWER: Oh yes, that's right, yeah.

PARTICIPANT: So all that, and so I don't know how you would describe that really. It's not really consumer or corporate or it's specific, it's Ag. Maybe I suppose veering towards the consumer, but I started off in that, and then I went from there into corporate. So I really spread, that, I suppose, mainly focused on corporate, so I went from there into, well, I did a little stint in politics in the 1997 Election with John Bruton, because I was asked to do that.

INTERVIEWER: And did that aspire, or come about as a result of your involvement with Agri PR?

PARTICIPANT: Well, funnily it did, in the sense that the person who was the Director of Communications with Fine Gael at the time was a guy called xxxx and xxxx had been the press officer for the IFA, so I had gotten to know Neil during my time in Agri PR and his time in the IFA.

INTERVIEWER: And were you involved in politics before that?

PARTICIPANT: No, no, no. He just thought I would be a good person for the job. I don't know really, just his knowing me made him think that I could do the job in-hand that he wanted somebody to do, so he asked me and I did it.

INTERVIEWER: OK. And during your time in public relations, how do you think it has changed?

PARTICIPANT: Well, I think on the plus side, I think it has become much more strategic in that communications is now seen as something which is as strategic and as important as finance, as HR, as operations. So more and more, since I came into the industry, communications people are sitting at the boardroom table and are demanding that space, so

that's, you know, that's definitely a change that I have seen, and it's a welcome change and it's necessary and I think the whole area of corporate reputation, reputational management, all of that, has become, you know, much more important to organisations than it would have been when I started first.

INTERVIEWER: And do you think that there has been, like, an upsurge or an increase, because my view of it all, would be I wouldn't think, that there is enough people in the industry sitting at the boardroom table yet, or if there is any at all, hardly?

PARTICIPANT: Well, I think you'll find that like, if you were to compare now to ten years ago, you'll find that there are more. Whether we're where we should be, we're not necessarily where we should be, but I do think there has been a definite shift in CEO's perceptions of how communications needs to be integrated into the key functions in the organisation.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, and it was an area I would have loved to have looked at actually, talking to clients...

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: And actually CEO's, and there's, but Jesus, there's only so much of them, like.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, yeah, yeah, but we're not there yet. We're not there yet.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. Are you involved with any of the professional organisations in public relations terms?

PARTICIPANT: No.

INTERVIEWER: Were you ever?

PARTICIPANT: I was, xxxxx back in the day twisted my arm and I sat on the PRII council for a little while.

INTERVIEWER: Great, yeah.

PARTICIPANT: But I really don't have much time for that. Well, a, I don't have much time, and b, I never found it very rewarding or very constructive or productive actually. I think the industry, conversely and ironically, is represented badly and poorly by its organisations.

INTERVIEWER: And do you think that should improve or does it matter? Would you rather if it was better?

PARTICIPANT: No, I think it should be better, I mean, as, for an industry which makes its living out of enhancing companies' reputations, the fact that it does such a bad job of its own, I think really begs the question, you know, "Why?" You know?

INTERVIEWER: Ok. And Ella, have you continued to educate yourself as in, like, self-educate, do you buy books online or would you rather, if you have time?

PARTICIPANT: I am desperate at that, no, I am desperate at that. I really am a firm believer, and maybe it's because that has been my experience, but I really am a firm believer on learning on the job. I haven't done any further education in any shape or form in the 20-odd years I have been in PR, and I have to say it hasn't, as far as I can see, it hasn't impeded my progress in the industry and...

INTERVIEWER: In the industry, yeah, and if you had a chance to read, like, any of the academic journals like PR Review or Public Relations Quarterly, would you read...?

PARTICIPANT: No.

INTERVIEWER: No? Even if they were proactively sent to you, or if there was a Webinar, or maybe something on YouTube, you know?

PARTICIPANT: There always were, now, I used to get them in Eircom, we used to get it, I think, and maybe in O2 as well, but...

INTERVIEWER: I remember what you were saying, because I doubt it was in the academic journals.

PARTICIPANT: If, no, probably not the journals. What's that big one, the A5 one? I think it was the UK, the UK industry magazine, what's that called?

INTERVIEWER: Right, OK, what's that...

PARTICIPANT: Public Relations News. You remember that one, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Oh yes, OK, so like a magazine.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, it was a magazine, yeah. Journals, no, I wouldn't know what she'd be talking about, no.

INTERVIEWER: OK, yeah, yeah, and then higher education as a preparation for work in PR. To what extent do you think higher education has become a prerequisite to public relations employment, as in do you think in order for graduates, well, not graduates, but people to get work in public relations, like, do you think that they have to have a higher education qualification?

PARTICIPANT: Any higher education, like a third-level?

INTERVIEWER: Whatever, anything, yes, yeah.

PARTICIPANT: Well, I think I do think it's important for people to have gone through the third-level system. I don't think it necessarily matters what they have studied. I think the most important thing for somebody, you know, who wants to pursue a career in PR really is their aptitude for it. I think PR is kind of, it's a bit of an outlier in that I don't think you can really teach somebody to be a really good PR person. If they don't have the aptitude, if their mind doesn't work a certain way and particularly if they don't have ordinary cop-on, they're never going to make it, irrespective of the letters after their name, or the amount of time they spend studying.

INTERVIEWER: OK, yeah, so ordinary cop-on, that's what... Yeah.

PARTICIPANT: Ordinary cop-on and the ability to get on with people and I know it sounds a bit like, you know, Miss World, but genuinely, I mean, in our industry...

INTERVIEWER: Genuinely.

PARTICIPANT: Genuinely, we spend too much time communicating with people, you know, and if you can't communicate, if you can't persuade, if you can't, you know, get somebody over on your wavelength of thinking, if you can't convince people of things, if you don't have that kind of skillset, if you don't have that ability, then you're not going to make it in the industry, I believe.

INTERVIEWER: OK, right, so then would you feel it's important to have a variety of routes into public relations then?

PARTICIPANT: Mmm, absolutely.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, so that they will never have it professionalised like law or medicine where you have to have that qualification in order to, you wouldn't like it to be professionalised that much, you know, where anyone really could set up a PR company at the moment you know.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, yeah, well I mean, I think at the end of the day, your track record speaks more than what qualifications, I mean, I have hired many times in different organisations and, you know, while I certainly would require somebody to have a third level because I just, it lets you know that they have gone through a system and they have come out the other side and been able to apply themselves and adapt themselves and whatever. I am

more interested in what they have done after that, and so I wouldn't be against it being professionalised, but I wouldn't rule people out either, you know, if they didn't have a professional PR qualification, if they were coming for an interview with me.

INTERVIEWER: But it wouldn't be the deciding factor for you?

PARTICIPANT: No.

INTERVIEWER: Alright, yeah. Are you involved with any developments in higher education, undergrad or...?

PARTICIPANT: No.

INTERVIEWER: In PR.

PARTICIPANT: No.

INTERVIEWER: No, no, that's it, no, exactly. Do you think that there should be more of an involvement between practitioners and academics?

PARTICIPANT: Well, I don't know because I have never really thought about it, so to what end?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, yeah. Like, for example, I would see a huge benefit, maybe any theories if we look at, maybe practitioners being more aware of them, if there was a forum there for people to watch, and equally so, like, I would have graduates every year and some of them could excel in one particular area.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: And I'm amazed that practitioners don't ring or contact or email or just say, "Pauline, have you got someone that's into A, B, C and D, because by God, we want your 1:1 person, whoever has got their 1:1" or whatever, you know what I mean?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: More interaction with the industry.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, and I wouldn't be against that but I suppose it is not something that I have ever thought about. I think the onus is probably on the education institution, to push that at practitioners and start that dialogue, you know?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, absolutely, yeah, yeah. Do you think graduates from public relations courses should be or could be, like, better prepared for work in PR than graduates of other subjects?

PARTICIPANT: They should be or could be?

INTERVIEWER: Well, why should graduates from these courses be better prepared?

PARTICIPANT: Oh well, I guess they would be in that, certainly they should have the technicalities, as in I mean the technical know-how so, you know, they would know how to construct a press release, they would know how to, you know, approach media and they would have a sense of, you know, I guess, I'm not sure of it but they will have a sense of what makes news and what doesn't make news. They would have, and actually this is a plus, they would have a more strategic approach potentially to communications, assuming that's part of the curriculum, you know, so that they would look at things not in a kind of knee-jerk kind of way, but they might look at things more in a holistic sense, you know.

INTERVIEWER: Right. Yeah. What do you think the balance between theory and practice should be on our courses?

PARTICIPANT: I think it should be 50/50.

INTERVIEWER: Do you?

PARTICIPANT: Oh yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So 50/50. A lot of people are actually saying more so practice than theory, practical knowledge, you know what I mean, than theory.

PARTICIPANT: Well...

INTERVIEWER: But if, you know, like, have you heard of for example, Grunig's four models or uses and gratification theory, all of these things that we cover. I mean, I don't expect you to know them, you know?

PARTICIPANT: No, no idea.

INTERVIEWER: Absolutely, but so I know for me, I can see why a lot of students go, "We're not going to be looking at this in the outside world. What are you doing?"

PARTICIPANT: Well, maybe they are, I don't know, what are...?

INTERVIEWER: It's kind of - "Why are we doing that?"

PARTICIPANT: And why are you doing that?

INTERVIEWER: Well, because there are a lot of theories that really are relevant to the practice, but I think we are nowhere there yet anywhere, and I mean, from going out to conferences internationally where they are really explaining how relevant those theories are to the practice. It's a huge help to the practitioners, but...

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, but I think it would be useful, I mean, I'm sure there's lots of stuff in there that would help practitioners if they knew about it, you know, so I would say 50/50 is probably about right, and there is probably practical, you know.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, yeah, making sure the theory is relevant, I suppose, and that it is, yeah.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, yeah, I mean there is no point in coming in with 20% theory, when you go, you know, like, it has to be a two-way thing. If somebody, you know, if somebody, if 50% of their course is practical, then they have to have something to bring to the organisation. So they bring their 50% theory to their 50% practical, whereas if you split it any differently, then you have got, then what are you bringing to the practice, you know?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, and what about ethics? Do you think that ethics is important for us to have on the syllabus? I mean, it is on the syllabus, but it should be, is it important for...?

PARTICIPANT: Ethics in what sense?

INTERVIEWER: So ethics in public relations, do you know, like, integrity and professionalism, making sure, third-party fees when you are invoicing, just not charging different fees...

PARTICIPANT: Oh right, yeah, yeah. Well, yeah, I mean, I suppose, I am a long time out of agency, so I don't know how much that goes on nowadays anyway, but I think you know, if you are charged, if you are being charged and being paid for being charged with clients corporate reputation, and if you yourself as an organisation are not acting, you know, to the highest ethical professional standards, then that just discredits an organisation, I would have thought.

INTERVIEWER: And I mean, it's not just that, I mean, it's also about withholding information that might be, you know, in the public's interest to know, and you know, even though we say it's not the done thing, it shouldn't happen, we know it does happen.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So looking at all those things as well, you know.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, but I suppose, are you talking about the client business then in that sense, yeah?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, so dealing with, yeah, or withholding information that might be relevant to one of their publics, you know?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: But you're loyal to the client because they are paying you.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, that's, your loyalty is to the client, I mean, at the end of the day, you know, I could see, I think that's where you would deploy your best negotiation and persuasion skills, and that's where, I think really, people that really stand out when they can convince a client company that what they're attempting to do is wrong and that in the long run, it will damage their reputation more, and that's an area that I feel that I have honed quite well, to be able to, you know, look to the future and actually paint a picture for a client as to how this could and would play out, if it comes into the public domain, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Finally, believe it or not, what, oh no, work placement. Important or not, do you think it's important?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, yeah, well this goes back to the question about, you know, the practice and theory and how, I think that work placement is hugely important. I think there is a challenge, I'm sure there must have been big challenges for the institutions, or, the educational institutions to actually find placements for people because I know, I have been approached at times, and I know that that's an option for us, but we are so busy and so consumed in what we do that it's very easy to go, "Oh God, we just don't have the time to spend with somebody to bring them along with us", you know? But somehow there needs to be a way of finding an attractive proposition for practitioners for organisations so that students actually get to see what it's really like on the inside, you know?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, yeah, because they don't.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, that, I know, I know.

INTERVIEWER: It's easy for me in that I dipped my toe in it, but it's different.

PARTICIPANT: I know, and I mean, in fairness, I mean, I started off on a placement as part of the course in Rathmines.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, did you, yeah? Right.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, I was terribly unhappy there.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, but you can still put it down to having some bit of experience, can't you?

PARTICIPANT: Well, I had some bit of experience, and what it gave me actually, Pauline, was it gave me experience of working in an office environment. In fairness, I could have been in any office, but you get to know, you understand, you start to learn about going, coming into work on time, how long a working day is, you know, finding your way around an office which is an education in itself. There's obviously office ethics, and there are things that go on in an office. So even that in itself is useful, for young people coming out of college who have never been in an office environment to learn, not to mind what they'll pick up in terms of the PR stuff.

INTERVIEWER: And if you were hiring a PR graduate, what do you think you would be looking for under three different headings – their skills, knowledge, and attributes... But the skills, knowledge, then, and these attributes as we call them, like, knowledge is what practitioners need to know obviously, and skills are what they need to be able to do, and then the graduate attributes like competencies, behavioural repertoires, sets of behaviours that support the attainment of organisational objectives. Now. Anyway, skills?

PARTICIPANT: Well, I suppose, what do I look for? I mean, I was only, I was recruiting recently, so I'm just trying to think back. It's amazing actually how many people apply for a job without having read the job spec, and they come in and they are clearly not able to answer the most fundamental of questions, which all revert back to the job spec, you know.

INTERVIEWER: That's mad, isn't it?

PARTICIPANT: So, it is, quite, and so skills, so somebody needs to, having the skills, the specific skillset like, you know...

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned people skills already, you know, as being very, very important.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: And you're absolutely right, you know, yeah.

PARTICIPANT: So for PR obviously, people skills, communication skills are vital obviously. You know, a confident air about people, and I'm not, it's a subtle thing and I have met people now, I mean, I had 100 applicants for a job recently, and the people that stood out were not the most, the ones that talked the most or the ones who spoke the loudest or whatever. It was the people who were just very confident in their, in themselves, in what they

have done, in being able to articulate that, and they had clearly thought about the job at hand and they had figured out what of their experience was relevant to the job, and they were able to sell themselves, so there was also a selling. So selling is a skillset as well, you know, as you know particularly from an agency perspective, so...

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, and I know you haven't mentioned it, but I imagine it would be important for you, is writing, because there would be so much writing, it's huge, yeah.

PARTICIPANT: Oh, writing is hugely important, yeah. Writing and attention to detail, which is really important in what we do.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, and that, yeah, and it's not just about being able to write well. It's about being able to write specific to your audience, and make sure that what you say and how you say it will be interpreted exactly the way you mean it to be, and that's something that not everybody gets. And this is just, and just going back to what I said at the beginning, not everybody has the aptitude, despite maybe having the skillset on paper or in their CV or in an interview, you know, if you don't have an aptitude for this business which is, it's quite complicated and complex, even though, and I know, you and I have had this conversation a long time ago, well, you know, there is often this perception that anybody can do PR and you know, you just have to look good and you know, wrap up and hold the clipboard or whatever. That's, you know, that is not, and that's one of the other, I think, advancements in the industry that has, that I have seen, I have seen less and less of that. I have seen more and more people coming through that have genuine substance and genuine ability to do the job.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. Have you anything else you want to add? No? That's it, you think? I mean, what you have given me is fantastic, Ella.

PARTICIPANT: Is it?

INTERVIEWER: You probably don't realise it, but it's great.

PARTICIPANT: Really.

INTERVIEWER: Brilliant! It's absolutely brilliant, so I'll just turn this off.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, turn that off. I mean...

INTERVIEWER: Well, I hate turning these things off because a lot of ye...

PARTICIPANT: No, but don't turn that off for a second.

INTERVIEWER: OK, yeah.

PARTICIPANT: I think, like, I think PR and public, and now I don't tend to use the word "PR" much anymore, you know.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, so is it one of these new, like, strategic management, and media management or marketing communications or...?

PARTICIPANT: No, I hate the term "marketing communications". That cracks me up altogether.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, good.

PARTICIPANT: But strategic communications or corporate reputational management, I like it. Reputational management to me, because reputational management really is what PR is, be it a representation of a person like a politician or an organisation or, you know, it's managing their reputation, and that, I think when you talk about PR in those terms, then people get a completely different idea of what it is. Because PR sells like spin, whereas reputational management is about, this is about my reputation and my company's reputation. It just puts people into a different mindset, I think.

INTERVIEWER: Very interesting Ella

PARTICIPANT: That's it. I think I have mentioned all them. I think that in my experience, that's what it is, and if people, you know, and it's complicated and it's frustrating and you have got a whole load of audiences to think about when you are saying something or doing something, you know, like, for example the Taoiseach is speaking at the IBEC dinner tonight. So he is speaking to a business audience, right? They are an Irish indigenous business audience and they are also multinationals. There is also media there. There are also other politicians there, you know, so he has a myriad of people that he is speaking to, and whatever he says, he is going to be interpreted differently by those different people, and the people like me who are advising on what he's going to say and how he's going to position it, we are the ones that need to think about, making sure that whatever he says, that lands with one audience, is not necessarily going to discommode another audience, you know?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, yeah, exactly.

PARTICIPANT: And that whatever is said in its entirety is not completely misinterpreted by the media who will then relay it to everybody else.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. It's so important. Thanks again so much Ella. Are you happy to turn this off now?

PARTICIPANT: OK, you can turn it off now.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. OK, we'll stop this recording now. Thanks again so much for your time Ella....

Appendix Six - PR Courses in Europe

**Table 18 - A synopsis of when PR Education Courses commenced throughout Europe
(Information sourced from Ruler and Vercic (2004))**

Country	Development of PR Education
Ireland	<p>The first course in public relations was held in 1951 at the Rathmines College of Commerce in Dublin, now part of the Dublin Institute of Technology. While the Public Relations Institute of Ireland (PRII) ran successful part-time courses, the first full-time course started in 1978 at Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) with the support of the PRII. Originally a certificate course, it evolved further into a postgraduate diploma in 1990 and a master's degree in 1997. The PRII introduced mandatory educational qualifications for membership in 1985, although this mandatory qualification can be either public relations experience at executive level for at least two years or a diploma in public relations (www.prii.ie). In 1997, the PRII introduced its own National Syllabus Diploma. Dundalk Institute of Technology in County Louth have a four-year, full-time course leading to a degree in Public Relations. Dublin Institute of Technology have a one-year Masters Degree in Public Relations. Cork Institute of Technology have a Masters (MA) in Public Relations with New Media as well as a one year part-time course in Public Relations. Other full time, evening courses are held in Dublin including a postgraduate diploma in Public Relations (Dip. PR) at the European Institute of Communications; a postgraduate diploma in Public Relations and Event Management at the Fitzwilliam Institute Group Ltd and a diploma in Public Relations (Dip PR) at the Rathmines College of Further Education. The total enrolment is in the region of 500 students annually. (Carty, 2004). The Institute of Technology Carlow, where I am a public relations educator, introduced the first ever degree course in public relations in Ireland in 1994.</p>
UK	<p>PR training started in the 1930s emphasising practical skills such as writing, presentation and media skills. Degree courses at universities started in the late 1980s, first at postgraduate level such as Stirling in 1988, followed by undergraduate level courses at Bournemouth, Leeds Metropolitan and Central Lancashire. Seventeen universities in the UK offer public relations programmes at</p>

	under and postgraduate levels of which more than half are approved the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR). The CIPR is one of the largest professional bodies in the world with over 8,000 members. (Koper 2004).
Northern Ireland	The turbulent political situation in Northern Ireland (particularly from the 1960s – 1980s) played a part in how public relations practice developed. The arrival of Ulster TV in 1959 had a positive impact as it was an attraction for key influences in business and government. (Koper 2004).
Austria (<i>Öffentlichkeitsarbeit</i> - the German term for Public Relations)	The first lectures on public relations were held in 1960 at the Institute of Journalism and Communication Science at the University of Vienna. Hans Kronhuber published the first book in 1972 simply titled ‘Public Relations’.
Belgium – Dutch speaking Belgians use the term “Public Relations” in English while the French speaking part of Belgium prefers to use its French equivalent, <i>Relations Publiques</i>.	In 1958 the Catholic University of Leuven offered the very first course in public relations. No university in Belgium offers separate graduate degrees in public relations or communication management. These areas of study are incorporated in undergraduate and graduate programmes in communications practices.
Bosnia-Herzegovina – official languages are Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian. The term for public relations is <i>Odnosi s javnoscu</i>.	PR is only studied at introductory level in a few courses or even a few lectures as part of other subjects such as marketing or journalism.
Bulgaria	The first degree course was launched in 1994 at Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski
Croatia	PR Education commenced in the late 1990s and in 2001 the Department of Culture and Tourism at the Faculty of Philosophy in Zadar (Croatia) in cooperation with University of Maribor in Slovenia, started MA and PhD courses in Information and Communication Sciences, journalism and public relations.
Estonia	Public Relations degree courses commenced at Tartu University in 1996.
Finland	In the 1930s, a correspondence school called <i>Markkinointi-instituutti</i> – ‘The Institute of Marketing’ offered business courses in various communication skills, such as advertising and the language of business. Teaching in public relations began in earnest the University of Helsinki in 1978 when an ly appreciated scholar Osmo A. Wiio was offered a chair in communication.
France	The communications paradigm supplemented that of ‘public

	relations' in France resulting in 'organisational communication' first developed in 1980s. Courses related to 'corporate communication' tend to be taught by information and communications science teachers and subjects relating to public communication are usually taught by political science teachers.
Germany	In the 1980s, PR education was institutionalised at universities and polytechnics as a marginal field of communications studies. By the 1990s, a development boom saw several German universities such as Berlin and Leipzig. 70-80 per cent of PR practitioners have a degree but only about 15 per cent have a PR related education and training qualification.
Greece	In 1999, the Technological Educational Institution (TEI) of Western Macedonia had the first academic department. The establishment of Communication and Media Departments in the early 1990s in Panteion University, Athens University and the University of Thessaloniki, increased course offerings in public relations.
Hungary	The first school to offer courses was SKULL – School of Communication, in 1992. The first PR department was established in the College of Business and Management Studies in 1994. 90 percent of the agencies are located in Budapest.
Italy	IULM University in Milan was the first university in Italy (in 1993) to have a formally recognised undergraduate course in public relations. Since then, three more undergraduate courses have opened in the University of Udine (Faculty of Foreign Languages); The University of Catania (Faculty of Political Sciences) and in IULM University, but now in the ITC branch at Feltre, near Padova.
Malta	The University of Malta provides education in the field of communication but does not offer programmes in PR beyond the introductory level. However, MA students in communications have completed research on public relations in Malta but it does not constitute a comprehensive scientific discipline.
The Netherlands	First BA programme in 1978
Norway	The University of Hedmark established an annual course in 1989 under the title 'Information and Community Relations'. The University of Oslo established a bachelor's degree in media and communications in the 1990s.
Poland	The first PR course (although an elective subject) was in the early 1970s. Although some doctoral and MA courses in PR have been achieved, it is believed that the growth of public

	relations as a discipline of science is still to come.
Portugal	Although the Institute of New Professions (INP) was the first school to offer public relations courses in 1964, the introduction of undergraduate degree schemes in social communication at the New University Lisbon was established in 1979 and at Lisbon Technical University in 1980.
Russia	In 1999, the HE requirements for public relations majors were defined and the Federal Russian Committee of Higher Education certified public relations as an official major at Russian Universities.
Serbia and Montenegro	The first certified education programme and curriculum for public relations practitioners started in Belgrade in 1991. The first postgraduate course was established in 1996 at the Faculty of Economics, University of Belgrade.
Slovakia	Although there are no provisions for education in communications studies or public relations courses, the first course in communications and PR was offered in 2001 by the College of Management which is a branch of the American City University, Bellevue, the first Slovak private university.
Slovenia	Larissa A. Grunig and James E. Grunig are commented to the academic education and research in public relations and communication management in Slovenia. As a result, the field became an academic subject taught at undergraduate level in 1994 and at graduate level in 1998 at the Faculty of Social Science, University of Ljubljana.
Spain	Although other smaller PR courses were available in the 1960s, the main step forward in PR education was the inclusion in 1974 of the degree in advertising and public relations in the programme of Information Sciences Universities.
Sweden	Although not generally referred to as Public Relations in Sweden, courses in mass media and communications developed in the 1970s and 80s.
Switzerland	Given that there are four official national languages (65% German speaking, 19% French; 8% Italian and .6% Rhaeto Romance) and each region has its own newspapers, magazine, radio and TV programmes. There are no independent studies of PR in universities and the SPRI – Swiss Institute for Public Relations, provides most of the training for industry.
Turkey	The first PR courses were given in 1966 in the School of Journalist at Ankara University but course moved in 1987 to PR departments in communication faculties.

Appendix Seven (a) – First Page of First Ever PR Syllabus in Ireland (1951)

PUBLIC RELATIONS

1951
 February 1
 Thursdays, 7.30–9.30 p.m.

D METHODS OF APPROACH

Lecturer: DAVID HAYES, Press Relations Officer,
 Aer Lingus Teo.

Synopsis

Public Relations Officers and Advertising Agencies are complementary. Examination of methods of conveying information through Press Advertising, Films, Radio, and News Information.

1951
 February 1

1951
 January 11

A THE PURPOSE AND PRACTICE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

Lecturer: EDWARD F. MACSWEENEY, Publicity Manager,
 Irish Cinemas Ltd., Odson (Ireland) Ltd.

Synopsis

Meaning and scope of Public Relations. Consideration of objective: a long-term or a short-term result. Origins and development of modern Public Relations.

February 8

E METHODS OF APPROACH

Lecturer: EDWARD F. MACSWEENEY.

Synopsis

Developing additional lines of approach to the public. Organisation of lectures and talks. Works visits. Exhibitions and displays. Public complaints.

January 18

B DETERMINATION OF POLICY

Lecturer: EDWARD F. MACSWEENEY.

Synopsis

Possible reactions of the public to a projected line of policy. Methods of interpreting policies to the public. Assessing public reaction to a policy when already in effect.

February 15

F LABOUR RELATIONS

Lecturer: M. J. HAYES, Labour Relations Officer,
 Córas Iompair Éireann.

Synopsis

Securing the co-operation of labour. Establishing good staff relations throughout an organisation. A contented, well-informed staff is a sound investment.

January 25

C PUBLIC RELATIONS AND INFORMATION

Lecturer: JOSEPH GALLAGHER, General Manager, Irish News Agency.

Synopsis

The dual responsibility of the Public Relations Officer to his organisation: (a) as a supplier of information on which policy may be based; and (b) as a spreader of information on policy when determined.

February 22

G "HOUSE PUBLICATIONS"

Lecturer: TOM O'GORMAN, Public Relations Officer,
 Irish Tourist Board.

Synopsis

The growth of "House" magazines. Their value for Public Relations purposes. Should they be limited to internal distribution, distributed to customers and potential customers, or made available through trade channels to the public?

Appendix Seven (b) – Second Page of First Ever PR Syllabus in Ireland (1951)

PUBLIC RELATIONS

1951
 Thursday, 7.30–9.30 p.m.

1951

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METHODS OF APPROACH

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